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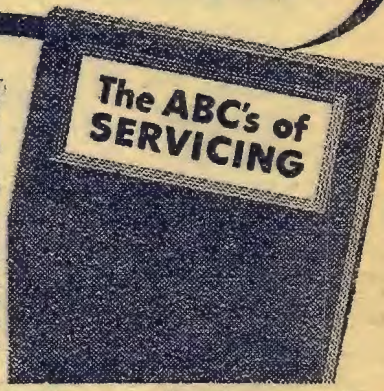

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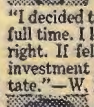

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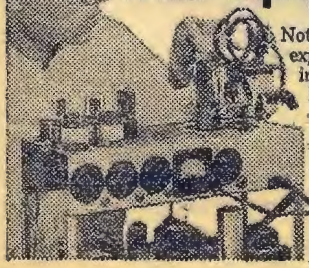

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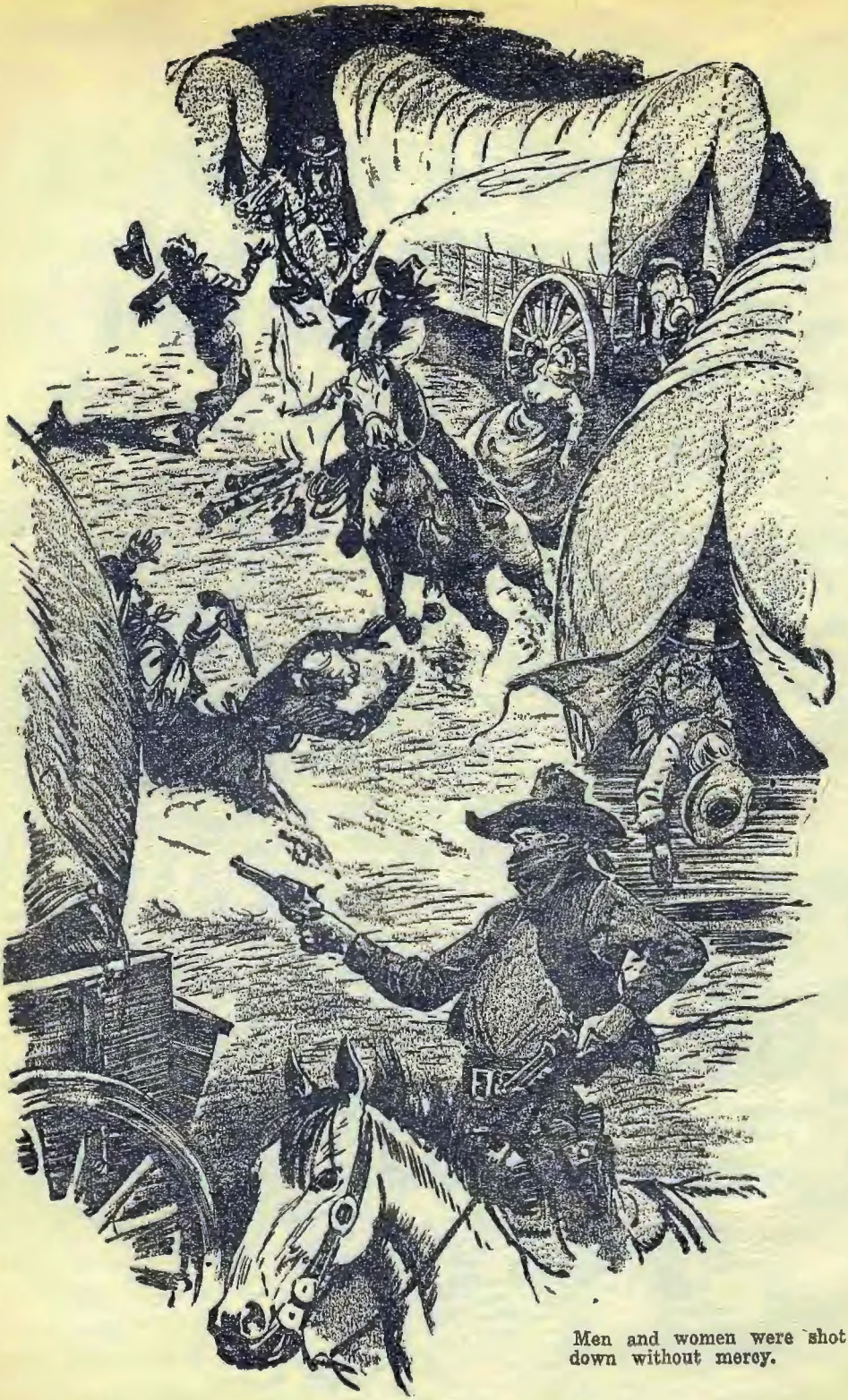

Men and women were shot down without mercy.

Davey was the sole survivor of the massacre; now he was determined to track down the men who had attacked the wagon train and slaughtered all save him. But the cost of that knowledge might be more than it was worth, Wes Landon tried to tell him.

MASSACRE MOUNTAIN

Featured Novel of Bitter Justice

by H. A. DeROSSO

BEHIND THEM, the mountain loomed massively. Scrub pine grew in patches more than halfway up its precipitous slopes but its crest was barren, naked rock. Dave Merritt reined in his buckskin, conscious more than ever of the mountain. He had been seeing it in his mind for ten years but it had never seemed as stark and cruel as it did right now.

Wes Landon rode on past, the sun making his close-cropped beard look very white as he threw a glance over his shoulder. When he saw that Merritt was not going to come on, Landon turned his grulla mare and rode back. After he pulled up, he sat silent in the saddle, his blue eyes grave and rather sad as he stared at Merritt.

The remembrance was sharp and searing in Merritt's mind, even though it had happened ten years ago; he expected it would never fade. The meadow looked green and serene with the wind rustling the leaves of the aspens that ringed the clearing. Merritt, however, was seeing it as it had been ten years before when the whole world had seemed to rock and crash with gunfire, and nothing but death had been in the air.

"Let's turn back, Davey," Wes Landon said. His voice was old and sad and tired. "This is no good."

Merritt said nothing. His bleak glance raked the meadow. The corners of his wide mouth were pinched in. The acquiline cast of his nose lent a sinister air to his features. He looked as if he had never smiled in his life.

Wes Landon sighed, folded his large-veined hands over the horn, and looked down at them. "Nothing can come of it," he said quietly, "it was too long ago."

"I can try," said Merritt. His tone was taut and hard.

Landon was still staring at his hands. "You can't change anything, Davey; you know that. Why not leave things as they are then?"

"My father and mother died here," said Merritt. His eyes had lifted and he was staring off into the great distances. "No one seems to care that nothing has been done about it—except me. You've talked me out of it before, Wes, but you aren't going to talk me out of it now."

"Ten years have passed," the old man said. His voice was soft with the sad wisdom of age. "The ones behind

the massacre of those emigrants likely left the country right away. They wouldn't have stayed around. You'll never find them here."

"Maybe," said Merritt, his lips tight.

Landon lifted pleading eyes. "Have I ever steered you wrong, Davey? Have I ever taught you anything that wasn't right? Listen to me, then, let's turn back."

MERRITT GLANCED at the old man, and Merritt's eyes softened briefly. He reached over and touched Landon's hands. "I'll never forget that you found me here after I'd been left for dead. You nursed me. I owe you my life. I was only fourteen then, but I remember every bit of it and I'll never forget. I'll never forget what you did for me, and what was done to my father and mother and the others. Don't ask me to, Wes."

"I'm getting old, Davey," Landon said almost wistfully. "We did pretty good, hunting mustangs the last few years. We've got enough saved up for that horse ranch we've always planned. You're all I've got, Davey; I don't want to lose you."

"You won't," said Merritt. "We'll have that horse ranch, too. We'll raise the finest blooded stock in the Territory, but I've got this other thing to do first."

"But it happened so long ago. It's too late to find out anything."

"Maybe. But at least I'll have the satisfaction of having tried. I couldn't live with myself if I didn't try."

"You're going through with it then?"

"Yes."

The old man sighed resignedly. The look of sadness deepened in his eyes. His shoulders slumped.

Merritt was preoccupied with his dark thinking so that he was hardly aware of this. He had been tormented so much by the memory that he knew he would have no peace until either the matter was settled or he was dead.

He touched the buckskin lightly with the spurs and the horse started across the meadow. Landon watched it a while, his leathery face taut where the whiskers did not conceal it. Then he started his grulla.

They rode in silence all the way to Bluewater...

The town of Bluewater lay among the foothills, part of it down in a hollow, the rest of it sprawling on the side of a slope. Bluewater Creek meandered through the hills after rushing down from the mountain, and it was the stream that gave the town its name.

Merritt and Landon rode over the plank bridge, their horses' hoofs raising a clatter of sound, and they picked what appeared to be the main drag and rode down this. When they came to the center of the town, right at the foot of the slope, they dismounted.

On the other side of the hitching rack was a saloon named the *Crescent*. Wes Landon glanced at it, swallowed, and suggested a couple of beers. Merritt did not answer. He was staring bleakly across the way, not even paying attention to the cigaret he was building. He stood there, a tall, dark man filled with brooding and a brutal purpose.

The old man glanced anxiously and sadly at Merritt. Landon's lips parted as if he meant to speak. Then he changed his mind and shrugged and went into the *Crescent*.

Merritt finished making his cigaret and popped it into his mouth. He lit a match and cupped his hands while he held the flame to the tobacco. When he lifted his eyes again, he noticed the girl walking toward him.

THE FIRST impression he had was that she was very pretty. She had brushed the hat from her head so that it dangled on her back from the chin thongs about her neck, and the sun rioted in her bright yellow hair. Her

face was round and her lips were rich and there was a cleft in her chin. She was wearing a tan corduroy split skirt and a fringed buckskin jacket and a red silk scarf about her throat. The scarf was held in place by a brooch that flashed dazzlingly in the sun.

She flicked a glance, impersonal and cool, at him as she started by. Merritt's blood had gone cold. Something frigid formed in his entrails and he stood there a moment, mesmerized. He turned as she walked by and the stunned paralysis left him and he reached out and grabbed her by the arm.

The touch alone was enough to startle her, but he was not even gentle about it. He pulled her about so roughly that a small cry broke out of her. Then she saw the look on his face and in his eyes and for a moment she turned rigid with fear.

"That brooch," he said, his voice so hoarse that he hardly recognized it as his own, "where did you get it?"

A moment more she stood there transfixed with startlement and fright. Then these passed and color touched her cheeks and her eyes blazed. "Take your hand off me," she said in a low, wrathful tone. She gave a jerk with her arm but Merritt only squeezed his fingers tighter.

"Where did you get that brooch?" he demanded again.

"Let me go," she said, eyes flaring with rage. There was a quirt dangling from her other wrist and she lifted that arm but Merritt saw it. Before she could swing the lash at him he had caught that arm also. "Let me go," she snarled again, twisting savagely but he only gripped her harder.

Fury and hate spasmed and clashed in Merritt. There was hurt, too, the hurt of a long and tormented memory. He could feel the pain of it crying in his brain. "You're going to tell me where you got that brooch," he growled; "I won't let you go until you tell me."

"You're drunk," she gasped, struggling ever harder. "You're drunk and crazy. Take your hands off me!"

"I want to know where you got that brooch!"

She drew back a foot and kicked him in the shins. Pain flashed across his brain and he almost lost his grip on her. Then another rush of anger obliterated the pain; he shoved her arms behind her back and twisted so hard that she moaned with hurt. His face was very close to hers as he snarled.

"You're going to tell me if I have to break your arms!"

"If anything's gonna be broke around here, cowboy, it'll be your head!"

It was said behind Merritt and it brought his head around sharply. The man was standing there with a six-shooter in his hand. His arm was half-raised and the barrel was tilted upward as if he were weighing whether to point the gun or bring it crashing down on Merritt's head. The sun glinted brightly off the marshal's badge on the man's shirt.

MERRITT'S fingers loosened and the girl gave a violent twist that ripped her free. She dropped back a couple of steps and stood there, breasts heaving and mouth working soundlessly with wrath.

"You all right, Miss Atherton?" the marshal asked. His glance, however, never left Merritt.

The girl nodded. She was rubbing her arms where Merritt had gripped her. Her eyes still blazed.

"I think you'd better go then," said the marshal, his gray glance growing chill. The flat planes of his cheeks looked hard and stern in the sunlight. "I want to tell this young jasper a thing or two."

The girl's heels made sharp sounds that quickly receded on the boardwalk. The marshal's gun came down until the muzzle was pointing at Merritt's

belt buckle. The marshal's eyes kept getting chillier.

He drew a deep breath as if fighting something within him. When he spoke his voice was calm but cold. "I don't know how you treat your women where you're from, cowboy, but we don't treat them that way in Bluewater. If I wasn't the marshal, I'd pistol-whip you to within an inch of your life. What's the big idea?"

The wrath still flowed in Merritt, but it was more of a subdued ache than an overwhelming rush. The quick beating of his heart was loud and sharp in his ears.

"I want to know where she got that brooch," he said.

The marshal's eyes narrowed. He leaned forward and appeared to be sniffing. "You don't look like you've been drinking," he said, somewhat to himself. He straightened. "Why are you so interested in that brooch?"

"It belonged to my mother."

"Oh?" said the marshal "You have been taking something. A stay in the jug will cool you off. March, cowboy."

The line of Merritt's jaw hardened. He became aware that Wes Landon and two others had stepped out of the *Crescent* and were watching, Landon with a resigned helplessness, but Merritt did not care.

"Did you get this hot and bothered," he asked, wrath roiling uglily in him, "ten years ago when those emigrants were massacred at the foot of the mountain?"

The marshal cocked his head to one side and the study in his eyes deepened. After a while, he said, "I wasn't marshal then." He studied Merritt some more, solemn and unwinking. "What's your interest in that massacre?"

"I was in it. Logan and Emma Merritt were my parents."

"I thought every one of the emigrants died."

"I didn't."

The marshal's gun drooped a little. "I'm sorry, son," he said. The chill was gone from his glance, but it was still wary. "You're mistaken about that brooch."

"I'm not."

"Look, son, you're all wrought up and I don't blame you. But tell me this: Isn't it possible for two brooches to be alike?"

"Not that one. I'd remember it a thousand years. I want to know where she got it."

The marshal sighed. His gun drooped some more. "I ought to run you in but I won't. However, I want to tell you this. If you're going to ask Grace Atherton about that brooch, take it easy, won't you? If you don't, someone might not understand and blow your head off..."

THE BUILDINGS of Box A, which was the Atherton ranch, were situated on a rise of ground. Cottonwoods were scattered about for shade but they were casting none now for the sun had just gone down behind the mountain. The leaves rustled softly as Dave Merritt rode into the yard.

He was alone. Wes Landon had wanted to come, but Merritt would not have it. He felt ugly and mean and the old man was forever asking him to desist; and Merritt did not know how long he could check his temper. He liked Wes and did not want to hurt him; so he had come alone to avoid any conflict of opinion.

The house had a gallery, and the girl was standing on this, watching Merritt ride up. He glanced about the yard and saw that a man had come out of the bunkshack. The fellow leaned against the front and began picking his teeth with a matchstick: His glance picked up Merritt and never left him. There was a sixgun in the holster at the fellow's side.

Merritt reined in the buckskin and stared at the girl. She drew herself up perceptibly under his scrutiny, her chin tilting as if in defiance. Her eyes

brightened with anger and a tint of color touched her cheeks.

Merritt could feel his heart hammering. A headlong excitement gripped him for he felt he was on the verge of discovery—if the girl would talk. It was the realization that she might not want to that filled him with irascibility.

He forced himself to pause while he got himself in hand. He would gain nothing if he lost his head, he told himself. He would learn nothing if he antagonized her as he had done earlier this day. It was an effort but he kept his temper subdued.

"I want to apologize," he began, "for the way I acted today. I went off half-cocked; I want you to know I'm sorry."

The girl said nothing. Her chin tilted a trifle more and she put her hands behind her back and clasped them. Standing like that, the pattern of her breasts was very plain against the red shirt she was wearing.

Merritt stirred in the saddle. He was aware of the eyes on his back, the eyes of the man in front of the bunkshack. Merritt glanced that way and the fellow still stood there, obviously idling, but his indolence was a trifle too studied to be entirely casual.

Merritt shifted his stare back to the girl. "I'm Merritt," he said. "My parents were killed in that massacre ten years ago. Have you ever heard of it?"

The girl frowned, and some of the rigidness left her. "I was very little," she said, "but I remember it." She paused, then said almost awkwardly, "I'm sorry for your parents."

He did not say anything to this. "I was left for dead, but somebody found me and nursed me back to health." He paused and drew a breath. His heart hit a hammerstroke as he sought for the right words. "I remember that my mother had a brooch that she prized very much. It's the brooch you were wearing today."

The girl's face paled. The corners of her mouth tightened. "You're mistaken; that brooch belonged to *my* mother."

"Where did she get it?"

"I wouldn't know. My mother died two years before the massacre."

The words stunned Merritt for a moment. His mind groped blindly without finding anything, his stomach felt as if the bottom had dropped from it. Then that stubborn conviction came to the fore again.

His eyes narrowed. "But your family was living around here before that massacre?"

"Mother died in Texas. Father settled here after the massacre. I remember it because everybody was talking about it."

"Could I speak to your father?"

"Father is dead, too. He died two years ago. . ."

- 2 -

MERRITT returned to Bluewater and he and Wes Landon took a room in the hotel. The old man was all for riding on in the morning, but Merritt would have none of it. The look of melancholy deepened in the old man's eyes and he said no more.

Merritt had breakfast alone. Filled as he was with ugly, brooding thoughts, he wanted no one around him, not even Landon. A crying urgency possessed Merritt this morning. He refused to concede the fact that he might be mistaken about the brooch. It was all he had to go on; he felt like a drowning man clutching at a straw even though it would not help but there was nothing else to grab. It was like this with Merritt about the brooch.

He decided to check on the Atherton family and he began making inquiries about town. What he learned corroborated the girl's story. Tom Ath-

erton, a widower, had drifted into the country soon after the massacre and had started Box A from scratch. He had been a lonely, solitary man who had not mixed much with his neighbors. It was said that he had never got over the death of his wife. For that reason he had left Texas but the remembrance had followed him here. He had died two years ago—wasting away, it was said, because he missed his wife so much.

Merritt inquired about Atherton's friends and was told he had no close intimates. Atherton had come to town only on business. So far as was known he had never entertained any one out at Box A.

Merritt ran up against a blank wall and had it been something tangible he would have smashed his fists against it. He felt so helpless he almost wept with rage and frustration.

He was sitting in a cafe having dinner when Wes Landon walked in and sat down beside him. The old man nodded but he did not speak. He ate in silence. He was not through when Merritt rose to his feet but Landon left his meal unfinished to follow Merritt outside.

"Davey," the old man said when they were on the walk. His tone was pleading.

Merritt hardly heard him. His mind was engrossed with that other thing that had been an obsession with him for ten years.

"Davey," the old man said again, tugging at Merritt's sleeve; "let's ride on, Davey."

Merritt came to a halt and shoved his hands in his pockets. His glance lay over the rooftops of the town where the naked crest of Massacre Mountain thrust up at the sky. "I've only begun, Wes," he said. "I won't be riding on for some time yet."

The old man seemed to hesitate. Then he said, "Have you found something?"

"No."

"Then let's ride on. This is no good for you."

"You can ride on it you want to. I'm staying."

"Please, Davey," said Landon. In the sun he looked small and withered and tired. His eyes were growing sadder every day. "You're just eating your heart out. You won't find anything; it was too long ago. The ones with a hand in it wouldn't have stayed around here. You'll never find them."

"They're around here all right. Where did that brooch come from?"

"Didn't you say Grace Atherton told you it belonged to her mother?"

"That's what she said," admitted Merritt, "but I know better. That brooch was my mother's. The killers took it along with all the other valuables and money. That's what they were after. We were on our way to California, and we had quite a bit of money along. They took the money and the valuables and the brooch."

"I'm not saying they didn't, Davey," the old man declared, "because robbery was the probable motive behind the massacre. But you're looking in the wrong place. After doing a thing like that, the killers quit the country. They wouldn't have stayed around here."

"Why wouldn't they?" asked Merritt. "They figured everybody was dead, didn't they? Besides, they were masked and it was at night. With everyone dead but me—and I was missing—who was there to recognize them? So why shouldn't they have stayed right here? They were safe enough."

THE OLD man shook his head. He kicked at a board with the toe of a boot. The close-cropped whiskers covered most of his face but still they could not conceal the grave look on it.

"It's no good, Davey," he murmured. "Believe me, I'm telling you for your own good. It's done and over and in the past. Why don't you leave it that way?"

"I'll never leave it that way."

Landon was still kicking at the board. However, he did not seem to be aware of doing this. "It's no good," he said almost in a whisper. "I wish you'd believe me."

Something had occurred to Merritt. His eyes narrowed as he thought on it. "You were hunting mustangs up around Massacre Mountain when you found me, weren't you, Wes? Did you see any strangers passing through or any one from town around there?"

"I saw no one. I had my camp in an out of the way place anyhow. I just came upon the wagons by accident and when I saw that you were still alive, I took you to my camp."

"Why didn't you take me into town?"

"You were a pretty sick boy. I didn't want to move you that long distance. Then when you got well I took you away with me because I didn't figure it would be good for you to stay around. There were too many things to remind you of what had happened; I wanted you to forget."

"I'll never forget."

"I know," said Landon, a tinge of regret in his tone. "I know..."

The old man said he was going to the hotel and he left. Merritt crossed the street to the *Crescent* and in front of the place he stopped, racked with indecision and a needling restlessness. He did not know where to proceed. He was at a standstill. It was this that filled him with a sensation of futility.

He rolled a cigaret and lighted it, but after several puffs threw it away. He cursed silently with vexation and lifted his eyes and saw the rider.

The man rode a big black horse that had been carefully groomed even though its hide was covered with a fine layer of dust as if it had come a long way. It was moving at a walk and its rider picked up Merritt with his eyes and held him there.

Merritt had never seen the fellow before but there was something personal and calculating in the man's stare. He was a big fellow, wide of shoulder and big of chest and tall, and he carried himself with a bearing that suggested here was a man of importance. The skin of his face was browned by the sun. The wrinkles were deep at the corners of his eyes. He had a gray mustache that drooped almost sinistrously about the corners of his mouth.

The brand on the black horse was Circle Dot.

Merritt met the stare and challenged it with the directness of his own but the big man's eyes never wavered. He even turned his head as the black horse passed by, the longer to keep his study on Merritt. Then the black horse was past and the man broke his stare and swung his head around to the front. The horse moved on, kicking up tiny spurts of dust.

Merritt's heart had quickened. He did not know why...

HE TURNED into the *Crescent* and went to the bar and bought a bottle of bourbon. He took this to a table in the far corner and sat there and drank and thought his dark, brooding thoughts.

This was the slack hour of the day and he was the only customer in the place. After a while, a man came out of a room in the rear and walked up to the bar where he leaned across the mahogany and talked to the bartender.

Merritt drank some more, his thoughts growing darker. He had believed the whiskey would cheer him up but it only depressed him more. But he did not quit drinking.

After some time, he became aware of eyes on him. He glanced up and saw that both the man at the bar and the bartender were studying him. They looked away when his eyes picked them up and pretended to become interest-

ed in something on the wall at the front of the saloon.

Merritt had learned their identity from Wes Landon. Walt Goodhue was a tall, dark man, graying at the temples. He fancied a hair-line mustache and a flowered vest and a cutaway coat. His sallow complexion indicated that he did not get outdoors much. He had the long, slim, delicate fingers of the gambler that he was.

George Baker, the bartender, was a gross hulk of a man. His jowls flowed down over the buttoned collar of his shirt and he had bright, gimlet eyes set deep in thick pouches. He seemed to be forever sweating, the oily globules sticking to the pink skin of his face, but, somehow, never trickling down.

Merritt kept his glance on the two. A truculence was growing in him; he felt mean and irritable because he wasn't getting anywhere. Baker started another look at Merritt, but when he found Merritt watching him Baker glanced hurriedly away. Goodhue was still absorbed with the front wall.

Finally, Goodhue stirred. He leaned across the bar again and said something to Baker which Merritt did not catch. Then Goodhue returned to the room in the rear which was his office. It was said that he and Baker were partners in the *Crescent*.

Merritt remembered his bottle and poured himself another drink. Awareness of everything else faded once more and he went deep into those dark thoughts. He was so absorbed that time was of no consequence to him, he had no idea how much of it had passed. He knew only the sense of futility and the long, pained remembrance and the ache of his loss.

THE THING that pulled Merritt back to the present was the whiff of a strong scent. He looked up and saw her coming across the room toward him, her mouth curved in a smile that was of iron, her hips working exaggeratedly. She was wearing a bright red dress that left her shoulders and a good deal of her bosom bare. The red color of her hair was as false as iron pyrites.

"Hello, doll," she said to Merritt. "Why so blue?"

He stared up at her and said nothing. When he did not invite her to sit, she sat down anyway, drawing the chair close enough so that she could lean against him without expending herself.

"You're new in town, aren't you?" she said, that smile fixed on her face as though it had been riveted there. He saw that her eyes were amber and as kind as those of a panther. "Is that why you're so lonely, doll? Don't you know anyone in Bluewater?"

He said nothing. The whiskey was swirling around in his brain but he still had enough reason left to wonder what she was doing out at this time of day. Her work wouldn't begin until the evening. So he sat and stared at her while an innate wariness crept over him.

When he did not speak, the woman went on, "Well, you won't be lonely any more, doll. Not with Ruby around. That's me," she said with what she obviously thought passed for a coy giggle. "What's your name, doll?"

"Merritt," he said.

She giggled again. "Let me pour you a drink," she said. She took the bottle and emptied some of it into his glass. When he did not reach for it, she edged it over until it touched his fingers, but he did not take it. He was staring at her fixedly.

"I think you're cute," she said, reaching up and stroking his cheek. "What did you say your name was?"

"Merritt."

"Merritt?" she echoed, crinkling her brows as though she were thinking of something. "Now where have I heard that name before. Oh, yes," she exclaimed. She made a clucking sound of sympathy. "You poor doll."

He said nothing. A faint feeling of rancor had started deep in him.

The smile was off her face now. His eyes had cleared enough for him to make out the wrinkles at the corners of her eyelids and in her brow and in her neck. Her face looked solemn and even sad, but the amber glance reflected none of this.

"Are you any relation to the Merritts who died in that massacre long ago?" she asked.

"That was my father and mother."

"You poor doll. They never found who did it, did they?"

"No."

"You were in the massacre, too, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"You poor thing." She reached up and stroked his cheek again. She was leaning so hard against him that he supposed if he were to rise suddenly she would go flat on her face. "Didn't you recognize any of them?"

HE SAID nothing. He was staring at those amber eyes that were like ice.

"But you were there, weren't you? Don't you have any idea who they were?"

"How long have you been in Bluewater?" he asked.

"About a year," she said. "But let's talk about you. I like you, you know; I want to cheer you up, doll. You got anything on your chest you just go on and tell it to Ruby. You'll find it helps. You'll find it helps very much, doll."

"How did you know about the massacre?"

She appeared to tense but only for an instant. Those amber eyes frosted over, however. "Why, people talk about it, doll. A horrible thing like that is remembered a long time."

"How did you know the names of my parents?"

She drew back as if she did not need him to prop her up any more. "I—I heard them mentioned."

"Who mentioned them?" His tone was hard and flat. The slur was gone from his tongue.

She drew back a little more. "Why —why here in the saloon, I suppose; they still talk about it now and then."

"Who sent you?" he asked.

"I don't know what you mean." The amber eyes were no longer empty of expression. They glowed with something like fear. She started to rise.

He reached out and grabbed her wrist and yanked her back in the chair. "Who sent you to pump me?" he growled.

She made a face, her painted mouth all awry. "You're hurting me," she whimpered. With the fingers of her other hand she was trying to pry his grip loose.

"This is nothing to what you'll get if you don't tell me," he snarled, squeezing harder so that she moaned with hurt. "Who sent you to pump me because I'm drunk?"

She started to rise again, free hand clawing at his shirt. Merritt pulled her back so roughly that she almost missed the seat of the chair. Her frightened shriek filled the barroom.

He leaned toward her, his grip cruel and relentless, his face working while the wrath and hate spasmed and convulsed in him. "Tell me," he snarled. "Damn you, tell me."

"Here, here," someone cried, "you can't carry on like this."

Merritt started to look up and the blow slammed him across the top of his skull The pain of it was a burning flash across his brain and his grip slackened and the woman, with a violent effort, ripped herself free.

Growling with anger, Merritt started to come up when he was hit again. This blow made his eyeballs sting. Dimly, he was aware that it was his hat breaking the force of the blows a little. Perhaps that was why he wasn't knocked unconscious yet.

"Manhandle a woman, will you?" someone was saying. "We'll teach you manners, buster; we'll teach you good."

MERRITT sensed another blow coming and this time he threw up his arms and caught the brunt of it on a fore-arm. He had to get up, something was screaming at him. He had to get up and pull his gun or do something. They meant to pistol-whip him to death.

He was rising, breath straining in his throat eyes and head aching, when the blow smashed him over a kidney. The pain of it strangled the breath in his throat and dropped a curtain of blackness over his eyes but it lifted almost instantly. Now he was aware that there were two of them, one in front and one behind him. He tried to lift his arms and found that they were held behind him.

The gun barrel slammed him on the skull again and this time the whole room pinwheeled and caromed crazily fod a second or two. The agony was reaching all the way to his toes now. He could see the black face of unconsciousness and death directly in front of him.

He sensed the gun barrel rise high and poise there. He even sensed the other lifting up on his toes to get more power behind the fatal blow. Merritt sensed all this but it was all he could do. He had no more strength in him. In another instant or two he would get some back, but by then it would be too late. He could never get it back in time to ward off the blow.

It seemed a long time coming to him. That was the first thing that seeped in to his comprehension. Enough time elapsed for half a dozen swipes with a gun barrel but he had not even been hit once. Not only that, but his arms were free. They were no longer being held behind his back.

More time passed, an eternity it seemed to Merritt, and then his eyes began to focus though they were still shot with pain. At first, all objects were blurred and fuzzy and they danced in view. But, after another eternity, they steadied and cleared and he saw how it was then.

Goodhue and Baker stood there to one side of him. There was a long-barreled sixshooter in Goodhue's hand but it hung slack at his side as though he had no intention of using it. Baker stood with his fists clenched and the pouches of his eyes so slitted with impotent wrath that it was a wonder that he could still see.

Both Goodhue and Baker were staring at something at the front of the barroom.

Merritt turned his aching eyes that way and his throat emitted a joyful sound. He stood there, small and tired and old, but the big .44 Starr was rock-steady in his hand and his eyes glowered with a wrathful determination. His chest rose and fell with the force of his breathing and it was apparent to any one that it was only with the utmost of effort that he was keeping himself from using the Starr.

It was Wes Landon...

- 3 -

IN THEIR room at the hotel, Dave Merritt soaked his head in the porcelain basin while Wes Landon sat at the window, looking out. The old man had not said a word since they had left the *Crescent*. He just sat and stared with a preoccupation as solemn and concentrated as death.

The pain had eased for Merritt. The cold water helped although it could not eliminate the hurt entirely. Only time could do that. After a while, Mer-

ritt wiped his hair with the towel, tenderly, wincing every time he touched a sore spot. When he was through he looked at Wes Landon but the old man went on staring outside. It was as though he were enrapt in a secret world of his own.

Merritt wanted to say something but the right words would not come to his mind. He tried to think but his head began to ache and so he went over and sat down on the edge of the bed. He sat there a long while, staring at the floor. When he finally lifted his eyes, he found that the old man was looking at him.

Landon's eyes were sadder and graver than they had ever been. "You know they meant to kill you, Davey," he said. His voice quavered a little.

Merritt shrugged and said nothing. His thoughts were growing dark again.

"Now will you give it up?" asked the old man.

"Now?" growled Merritt, snapping his head up so abruptly that it rang with pain. "Give it up now when I'm finally on the right track?"

"What do you mean?"

"Thy tried to kill me, didn't they? They're scared I might find out something. Goodhue and Baker," he said, mouthing the words hatefully. "Now I know where to begin."

Landon shook his head. "You've got it all wrong, Davey. They got worked up because of the way you handled Ruby. You can't deny you were rough with her. You were rough with the Atherton girl, too. You're getting a bad name in Bluewater. Don't you see?"

Merritt lowered his eyes and scowled at the floor. Right now the anger was a sullen, resentful thing in him. He said nothing.

"Davey," the old man said, pleadingly. Merritt heard him rise and come toward him, spurs singing softly. "Davey," the old man said, laying a hand gently on Merritt's shoulder. "I don't want anything to happen to you. You can't go busting around like a ladino in the brush. People won't understand. Just like Goodhue and Baker didn't understand today." He sucked in his breath with a sound like a cry. "You'll be killed if you don't lay off, Davey."

"Killed?" growled Merritt, lifting his head again. His lean face was dark with brooding and the long hate. "The only ones who would want to kill me are those who killed my parents." His eyes narrowed as a thought struck him. "Do you know something, Wes? Is that why you want me to give it up? Do you know something you aren't telling me?"

The old man shook his head. He took his hand off Merritt's shoulder and made a turn around the room, head bowed as though he were pondering on something. He came to a halt in front of Merritt and shook his head again. His eyes were on something far beyond this room.

"You're all I've got, Davey," he said in a low, wistful tone. "For the past ten years you've been my son. I never knew how lonely I was until you came along. You put a dream in my life. I suppose if I hadn't found you I'd have knocked around until the day I died. That day isn't very far off, Davey, and I'd like my dream before it comes." His voice broke a little. "I can't have that dream if you're dead, Davey."

MERRITT felt his eyes sting. A sense of shame and remorse settled over him. He had been so wrought up in his purpose that he had forgotten everything else. He had not cared for the consequences. Until this moment, he had not cared whether he lived or died but that was because he had never looked beyond himself. He had not paused to think what his death might mean to someone.

He rose to his feet and smiled ten-

derly at the old man. Merritt's voice was soft, the virulence was gone from it. "You'll have your dream, Wes; I promise you. We'll have that horse ranch and it won't be long. Only I've got to settle this thing first."

He swallowed and went on, "They're my father and mother. I owe it to them. Can't you see? You're my father, too, Wes, and if something like that happened to you, do you think I'd just sit back and forget about it? You know I wouldn't. I don't like doing it. I'm no killer; I've never killed a man before but I've got to kill these men. I've just got to! Can't you see that?"

Landon dropped his head. He stared at the floor and said nothing. His shoulders sagged.

Pity flowed through Merritt. He had not realized how much he liked this white-bearded old man until this moment. He did not think he had ever loved his parents quite as much. Merritt's eyes stung again.

"I'll be careful, Wes," he said when the old man did not speak. "I promise. I've acted dumb and foolish the past two days but I'll stop and think things out before acting from now on. I won't go off half-cocked any more. Does that make you feel any better?"

"I suppose," said Landon, still staring at the floor. His voice sounded old and tired. "I suppose it does..."

In keeping with his promise, Merritt left the room only to eat and then returned directly to it. He thought of the *Crescent* and Walt Goodhue and George Baker but he did not go there. He knew that if he did, there would be violence and even dying and he wanted to think things out a little more before resorting to that.

Wes Landon was gone for a couple of hours and when he returned he smelled as if he had been drinking. This struck Merritt because the old man had never been one for hitting the bottle. He liked a few beers when he was dry but that was all.

Landon said nothing and neither did Merritt. The old man took off his clothes and went to bed. Merritt heard him tossing restlessly well into the night but the old man finally dropped off...

IN THE MORNING, Merritt saddled his buckskin and rode out of Bluewater alone. He did not want to mope around town because the ugliness was on him again and thoughts of Goodhue and Baker were preying on his mind. He did not want to chance running into them because if he did, despite what he had promised Wes Landon, he would have it out with them one way or another. He still intended having it out with them but he would wait a day or two and see if he could not think of something else.

He took no particular direction since he had nowhere to go, only out of Bluewater, so that it came as a thing of surprise when he noticed that he was on the road to the Atherton ranch. He reined in the buckskin then because he did not want to go there. He wanted nothing to do today with any one whom he suspected of having had a connection with the massacre.

He had started to rein the buckskin around when he spied the rider topping a rise. Recognition came instantly and Merritt's heart skipped a beat. He pulled in the buckskin and waited. The rider was Grace Atherton.

She rode up, sitting astride a sorrel mare. She was wearing the corduroy split skirt and a green shirt. The hat on her head was pulled down in front so that it shaded her eyes, concealing any expression they might have held. The line of her mouth, however, was thin and grave.

Merritt felt solemn himself. He nodded to her briefly and she returned

the greeting just as perfunctorily. He could feel her eyes searching his face as though seeking the secrets of his mind.

She had stopped the sorrel close to the buckskin and the horses nuzzled each other. In the distance the height of Massacre Mountain loomed. The sun was very bright this day but still the shadow of the mountain seemed to fall on them, dark and oppressing.

After an interval, she said, "I was going to Bluewater to see you." She spoke woodenly.

Merritt lifted a brow in surprise. "Yes?"

"I've got something to tell you."

His heart gave an exultant leap, then he put the sensation from him. He had been disappointed so many times before that he was not going overboard on anything any more. He said nothing; the glance he kept on her was dark with skepticism.

She stirred in the saddle as though she could not find a comfortable spot. Folding her hands on the saddlehorn, she put her eyes on them. She gave the impression of mulling something troubling over in her mind.

"I thought all day yesterday about what you'd said to me," she began, her tone low and barely audible. She was still staring at her hands. "I've been trying to remember about that brooch. You see, I can't recall ever seeing my mother wearing it. However, I was only eight when she died. Maybe that's why I can't remember."

Merritt's heart had quickened. A heady excitement was racing through his blood. He couldn't speak because his throat was too tight. He could only stare at the girl, his eyes sharp and piercing.

THE GIRL paused. Her tongue came out and licked her lips which had lost their color. After a while, she resumed, "The reason I said the brooch belonged to my mother was that I found it among my father's belongings. I found it there after he had died, and so I assumed it had been my mother's; I had no reason to think otherwise."

She lifted her head now and the look she laid on Merritt was pleading. Little lines of anguish edged her mouth. Though he could not see them clearly, he was sure her eyes were misted with tears.

"I remember how sad and lonely my father was all the years we lived here," she went on. "I thought all the while it was because he could not forget mother. But now that I think on it, he didn't start to mope until we settled here. He wasn't like this back in Texas; even after mother died he was never as blue and lonely as he was here. It was as if he had something eating away at his heart and mind, something that hurt him much more than the loss of mother."

She paused again to lick her lips. A strange feeling was growing in Merritt. It was like nothing he had ever experienced before. The sense of triumph was fading from him. In its stead was coming a great compassion.

"Father used to ride a lot alone. I wondered where he went by himself and one day I followed him and I came upon him in the meadow where the emigrants had died. He was sitting on his horse in the middle of the clearing and his head was bowed and he didn't even hear me ride up. When he finally noticed me and lifted his head, I saw that he had been crying. I thought at the time that it was because of mother, but now I know it wasn't. He was crying because of the people he had helped to kill in that meadow. It was remorse over this that sent him to his grave."

Merritt saw her bite her lip and then her head dropped. Her shoulders shook once, then she went on, "He was a murderer, and he was forever sorry

about it, but that didn't help. The dead were dead and all the tears and remorse in the world would never bring them back. He knew this and it killed him. Not that he didn't have it coming to him, but he was still my father."

She started to cry then, openly and brokenly. She balled a hand into a fist and raised it and bit down on the knuckles, but even this did not stifle her sobbing.

Merritt felt his eyes fill. He had never thought that the moment of revelation would be as bitter and joyless as this. The feeling of compassion deepened in him, he felt his heart go out to the girl for he could understand how it was with her.

His parents were dead, too, and the loss was a great void and ache in him but their memory was something fine and treasured. The girl, however, had none of this in respect to her father. Remembrance of him could only be tarnished with shame and regret and the agonized knowledge that the thing was beyond reparation.

He kneed the buckskin over close to the sorrel. Reaching out, he put an arm about the girl's shoulders and that was all. The words he wanted to say choked in his throat, his mind would not even picture them. Never in his life had he wanted to say something comforting as much as he did right now but his brain and tongue failed him.

AFTER A while, however, the girl's sobbing diminished and soon it was gone. Merritt took his arm away. The girl got out a handkerchief and blew her nose and dabbed at her eyes. She sniffled once and then she had herself in hand.

"I'd like to try to make it up to you," she said, her voice a trifle hoarse. "I know I never can but I'd like to try. I know how it must have been with you. If there's anything I can say or do to help, just ask."

"If you'd rather wait another day," he said, "when you feel better."

"I want it over with," she said; "I don't want it dragged out. I know I can never make up for what father did but I'm willing to try."

Merritt's throat was dry. When he spoke, the words ached in it. "Do you know who was in it with your father?"

She shook her head. "He never spoke of it, of course; I don't know who his partners were."

"Didn't he have any friends?"

"Father never visited anywhere and no one visited the ranch because of that. He went to town seldom and then only on business. I don't know why he stayed on here except that the whole thing had a horrible hold on him. Then, too, I suppose he realized he could never forget it, no matter where he went."

"Did he know Goodhue and Baker, the owners of the *Crescent?*" Merritt's heart had picked up. It was beating fast again.

"I suppose he did," said the girl. "They were never out to the ranch, though. Father drank a lot those last years but he did most of his drinking home alone. I know he stopped at the *Crescent*, and at the other saloons in Bluewater—but never for long, and he certainly didn't favor the *Crescent* over the others. He would always buy a bottle or a jug and then go home and drink by himself." Her eyes lifted and studied his face. "Do you suspect Goodhue and Baker?"

He told her what had happened the day before. "I might be wrong," he finished, "but I think they meant to kill me because they're afraid I might turn up something. Are you sure your father never had anything to do with them?"

"As far as I know he didn't."

"Where were you at the time of the massacre?"

She frowned as though straining in recollection. "I was only ten then; I can't remember too well. I think that must have been the time he left me for a couple of weeks with a woman in San Leandro, about fifty miles west of here. He said he was going to look around for a place. When he returned, he brought me here to Bluewater and then he started Box A."

"Didn't he have any dealings with anybody then?"

"It's so long and I was so little," she said. "I don't recall anybody in particular. He used to take me to Bluewater with him but he went only to the stores and shops and stopped hardly at all at any of the saloons. I don't remember him ever being close with Goodhue and Baker."

She must have read the disappointment on his face for, after giving him another searching look, she said, "I haven't been much help, have I?" She sounded sad and apologetic.

He managed a slight smile. "That's all right. At least, I know I'm on the right track."

"Is there anything else I can do?"

He reached over and touched her hand. It was cold to his fingers. Something strange stirred deep in him and he felt his throat constrict. He found himself wishing that there weren't so much sadness and gravity in the world. He would have liked to have seen her smile.

"You've already done more than I expected," he said. "Please don't take it to heart; it was none of your fault..."

IT WAS SUNDOWN when Merritt returned to Bluewater. He put up the buckskin at the stable and then went to his room. Wes Landon was there. He seemed anxious about something.

"We've got a job, Davey," he said, "if we want it."

"Job? What do you mean 'job?'"

"Ferris Welch—you don't know him but he owns the biggest ranch in these parts—heard about me and you being mustangers and he came to me and said that there's some wild horses bothering his stock. There a stallion in particular that plays hell with his cavvies. Just the other night he broke into a corral and made off with Welch's two best mares. Welch hasn't had any luck in catching this stallion and his herd and so he offered us the job."

Merritt said nothing. Something was tugging at his mind but he could not figure out what it was. The darkness and sullenness were coming over him again.

"Please, Davey," the old man said pleadingly. "It won't take us long. Maybe only a few days because we're good at that sort of thing. And Welch pays well. He pays very well. It's our chance to add to our kitty. What do you say?"

Merritt laid a hard, direct look on Landon. "Are you sure this isn't just a scheme to get me out of Bluewater?"

The old man made a futile gesture with his hands. "Would it do any good? You can always come back, you know. Why don't you say yes? We'll make some money and you can think things over and maybe get a new slant on them. When it's over you can return to Bluewater. I know I could never keep you away for good," he said sadly. He lifted beseeching eyes. "How about it?"

Something touched Merritt's heart. Perhaps it was the look in the old man's eyes. Then, too, Merritt remembered how sullen and abrupt he had been the past few days. He had been pretty rough with this fine old man. It would not hurt to try to make it up to him.

"All right," he said. "What outfit does this Welch own?"

"Circle Dot..."

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THE HOLDINGS of Circle Dot stretched up into the mountains. They included the meadow where the emigrants had died. Circle Dot was the largest and most prosperous ranch in the county.

In the morning, Dave Merritt and Wes Landon saddled up and rode out to Circle Dot's headquarters. There they met Ferris Welch. It came as no surprise to Merritt that Welch was the man he had seen that day in Bluewater, for Merritt had remembered the brand on the black horse.

Welch was cold and aloof. He gave the impression that this was his constant demeanor. Nevertheless, Merritt had the feeling again that Welch was displaying a strong curiosity about him. Welch's eyes were veiled and even arrogant but still there was something personal in them every time he glanced at Merritt.

Welch was brief and to the point. He stated that he wanted the marauding stallion and his band captured. He cared nothing about how long it would take or the expense but he expected results and he would not pay if there were none. He struck Merritt as the kind of man who always drove a hard bargain and it was not surprising for this was probably how he had built Circle Dot into its position of prominence.

Landon got a week's supply of grub from the cook, and then he and Merritt rode north, toward the mountain range. At nightfall, they were in the mountains. They camped beside a spring and in the morning they decided to make the spring their base while they scouted the country for sign of the stallion and his band.

They split in order to cover more country. Merritt rode all that day without coming across any mustang sign. By evening a vague uneasiness had begun stirring him. Its exact nature eluded him, yet somehow he had a prescience of evil. He could not account how he came by it.

When Merritt rode in to the spring at sundown, Landon was already there. The old man had a fire started and the coffee was on and he was working on some sourdough biscuits. He confessed that he had found no sign, either.

They did not speak much; for once, they did not discuss the matter that had brought Merritt to the town of Bluewater. Merritt welcomed this lapse for the discussion always took the same turn, the old man advising against the investigation while Merritt stuck to his purpose adamantly. He did not like to go contrary to the old man's wishes, and for this reason Merritt was glad the matter was not mentioned.

It was dark when they had finished eating and they turned in. They figured they had another hard day of riding ahead so they sought to get as much rest as possible.

Although Merritt was tired, he found he could not sleep. He lay there in his blankets, listening to the old man's quiet breathing as he slumbered. Landon had seemed strangely serene this evening. The sadness had not been so evident in his eyes and Merritt wondered about this.

THAT VAGUE premonition began troubling him again. He could not understand why he should feel this way. Something was lurking at the edges of his comprehension, and try as he might he could not discern what it was, except that it was something grim and unpleasant.

"A gambler was shot mysteriously, a few years later."

He threw off the blankets once and pulled on his boots and went for a walk in the night. The queasy sensation accompanied him all the way. He was beginning to feel that it was the key to that which he had been seeking but that was as far as his understanding of it went. At this point, it encountered that blank wall again. He swore and tried to dismiss the thoughts from his mind but they would not go.

He returned to his blankets and lay a long while, staring up at the winking of the stars. Now and then an image of Goodhue and Baker worked in between his eyes and the sky, and a faceless image, also, which he took for that of Tom Atherton whom he had never seen and would never see. After a while, he fell to thinking of Grace Atherton and what an empty, desolate world it must be for her having to live with the memory of her father as a murderer and thief. Something filled Merritt's throat as he thought of this. He was still thinking of her and her anguished memories when sleep finally came to him.

He awoke with the smell of boiling coffee in his nostrils and he saw that Landon was getting breakfast. Merritt pulled on his boots and then he washed up at the spring. They ate in silence and immediately after saddled up. They agreed to split again today and they rode off as the sun came up from behind Massacre Mountain.

The presentiment of evil was stronger than ever in Merritt today. He found himself several times scanning the country anxiously, looking for something other than wild horses. There was no trace of them today, either, and this heightened the sensation of uneasiness in him. Little cold feet began traveling up and down his spine.

He found this canyon and he rode up its serpentine length until he came to its box end. He thought that this would make a good trap if the mustangs were ever located and he decided to keep the canyon in mind. He had just started back when something winking in the sun alerted him.

That was all the attention he gave to it. He did not study it to see what it was. He just grabbed his Winchester out of its saddle boot and threw himself out of the kak. He was still in the air when he heard the vicious whistle of a bullet past him. Then he hit the ground and as it sloped a little he rolled over and over down the incline until he was in the shelter of some bushes.

Several slugs came whistling through the clumps, clipping twigs and leaves. One of them left its hot breath on his cheek and he crawled on his belly until he had achieved the more solid shelter of a rock. He lay there, breathing hard and fast, listening to the slugs whine as they ricocheted off the boulder.

A second rifle opened up now, coming from the other side of him, and he had to quit the boulder before he had caught his breath. He hugged cover as best he could as he aimed for a stretch of timber ahead. Once he had to expose himself and something that felt like the red hot end of a running iron pressed itself for an instant against his side. Then he heard the whine and he knew it had been a rifle slug. He threw himself into a dent in the ground and dragged himself along in this, using his elbows and knees, not daring to rise even a little for bullets were burning the air above him.

SWEAT WAS coursing down his face. He could feel it running into his eyes and dripping off his chin, his shirt was plastered to his back with it. The breath moaned in his throat. He thought his lungs would collapse from the agony of breathing. But he kept on crawling, holding on to the Winchester. He did not dare stop even for a second.

It seemed to Merritt that an eternity

had passed and another had begun before he finally reached the timber. He dragged himself behind the trunk of a large pine and for a while he lay there, listening to the groan of his breathing. His heart was beating like a frantic drum in his ears.

After a while, when he no longer had to breathe in spasmodic, aching gasps, he rose to his feet and drifted into the timber. They were two to one but he still figured the advantage was his. They had to come to him if they wanted to kill him and they had to kill now that they had started the violence. He had only to wait.

He found a place at the foot of a slope where several rocks formed a parapet that protected him from all sides and he decided to wait here. He checked the Winchester to see that it was fully loaded and then he cocked the weapon and started to wait.

There was no underbrush here. The pines made long, cool avenues where the sun never penetrated. Merritt lay there, with only his eyes above the parapet, staring until they ached, and then staring some more.

At first, it was just a glimmer of movement like the passing of a shadow. It was so tenuous as to make Merritt think it was unreal. He felt sweat dripping from his chin as he waited for the movement to repeat itself.

After a long interval, it came again. This time it was a definite flicker in the shaded depth of the timber. Merritt waited some more, eyes straining, heart racing. His hands were wet where they gripped the Winchester.

Then he saw it again. This time there was no doubt about its reality. It was a man, working his way from tree to tree. He would pass swiftly from the cover of one pine to another and then pause there while he scanned the layout ahead.

Merritt took a deep breath and held it as he looked down the long barrel of the Winchester. His cheek was wrinkled against the stock. The man tried it again, leaving his tree for the cover of the next, and for the briefest instant Merritt caught the fellow's chest in the sights. Merritt fired.

The crack of the Winchester was a flat sound. The land picked up the echo and sent it rolling through the timber and into the country beyond. The man's stride broke. The rifle dropped from his fingers as he raised both hands to claw at his chest. He plunged to his knees and for a moment stayed like that, bolt upright, his head thrown back while his hands scratched frenziedly. Then he started to sag, slowly and gently, inclining more and more forward, as though he were very tired and was laying himself down for a long sleep.

The slug screamed as it ricocheted off a stone next to Merritt's head. Splinters of rock stung his cheek. He started to flinch, then recovered and came around as another slug shrieked past him.

THEY HAD worked in on him from two sides to catch him in a crossfire. Only the position of the rocks saved Merritt. He saw the other one now, kneeling behind a large pine and aiming a rifle around it. Merritt poked his Winchester through the narrow crack between two stones and waited while the other got off another shot. This one whined with a banshee wail as it bounced off stone.

The man behind the pine edged out a little to get a better aim. Merritt caught a glimpse of a shoulder and he fired at this. He saw the shoulder jerk even as the Winchester roared and someone shouted with pain. The force of the slug rocked the man back from behind the pine and in this instant Merritt took a quick bead on the fellow's chest and fired. This bullet bowled the man over. He fell on his back and lay there, moaning and moving his arms weakly.

Merritt's heart was pounding with hard hammerstrokes as he rose to his feet. On the instant, his knees shuddered, then they steadied and he walked out from the rocks. He went up to where the man still moaned and twitched his arms. It was Walt Goodhue. Merritt picked up Goodhue's rifle and took his sixshooter.

Then Merritt went over to the other one who lay as he had fallen, his face pushed into the floor of the forest. With the toe of his boot Merritt rolled the body over and found himself looked down at the contorted, dead features of George Baker.

Merritt returned to Goodhue who still lived. However, it was apparent from the blood welling out of the wound in his chest and from the pallor of his face that he did not have long to go.

There was no pity or regret in Merritt as he looked down at the dying man. He kept remembering that night of horror ten years ago and nothing relented in him.

Goodhue's breath was coming in a harsh, labored way. His eyes were open and they were staring straight up at something in the unfathomable distances. What they saw was not reassuring for the surfaces of Goodhue's eyes were glazed with a luminous terror.

"Goodhue," Merritt said, his voice hard and cold. "Listen to me. You're dying; you know that, don't you?"

Goodhue made a sound in his throat that was garbled. He shook his head a little as if trying to deny something. But the fright in his eyes deepened.

"You were in that massacre ten years ago, weren't you?" Merritt went on. "You and Baker and Atherton. How many more were in it with you?"

Goodhue shook his head again. His terrified stare was still into the vast distances. His breath rattled in his throat.

"You don't have much more time," said Merritt, his tone cruel. "You know that, don't you? You're dying with a lot of black marks against you, Goodhue. You're gonna burn in hellfire. You don't have much time to try to make up for all the black things you've done. I don't know if they'll help you any where you're going, but you might try. How many more were in it with you, Goodhue?"

The terror brightened in Goodhue's eyes. It was as though he had finally glimpsed the face of death hurrying with inexorable speed toward him. His throat emitted a tiny, crying sound.

"Tell me, Goodhue," said Merritt. "How many more?"

Goodhue's mouth grimaced. His eyes bulged from the pain the effort to talk gave him. "Two," he gasped. "Two more."

"Name the names," Merritt said grimly.

There were deep lines at the edges of Goodhue's mouth. His nostrils were pinched. The pallor was very deep on his face and suddenly the luster of his eyes began to fade although the terror persisted. His mouth worked soundlessly, twice, then he found his voice and with his last breath Goodhue said: "Ferris Welch and—and Wes Landon..."

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HE LEFT Goodhue and Baker where each had died and walked out of the timber. He was still stunned. He seemed to be walking in an unreal world. It was like a bad dream out of which he kept hoping desperately he would awaken. But it was not a dream. Merritt realized that when the shock left him and the pain began in his mind and heart.

"One man nearly got away, but the Raiders hunted him down."

He found the buckskin after considerable walking. Only now did he glance at the sun. He saw that most of the day had passed. He mounted and headed the horse back toward the spring.

He was all confused inside. The old hate and rancor were still there but now there was something new—a sadness and regret. Once he felt tears well up into his eyes and he brushed them away with the back of a hand.

By the time he raised the campsite he was quite cold and grim within. His eyes had narrowed to grave, bitter slits. The corners of his mouth were pinched in. Strain had drawn the skin tight over his cheekbones and along the ridge of his jaw. Now and then something would start to wail in him but he always put it aside.

The grulla was grazing at the end of its picket rope and there was the mixed odor of woodsmoke and boiling coffee in the air. Wes Landon was squatted in front of the fire, busy with a frying pan, and he threw a look over his shoulder and smiled a greeting.

Merritt dismounted. He made no move to unsaddle the buckskin. He came ahead a couple of steps and then he stopped and raised a glance at the distance. The sky was red where the sun had just gone down behind Massacre Mountain.

Merritt turned his eyes back on the old man. "Any luck today, Wes?" he asked.

Something in his tone brought the old man's head around sharply. He caught the look on Merritt's face and Landon rose slowly to his feet. For an instant, the sadness was very deep and vivid in his blue eyes. The white beard concealed any other expression his features might have held.

"No, Davey," he said very softly. His eyes were probing at Merritt's face. "What about you?"

"Not a sign."

"Tomorrow's another day," the old man said, trying to sound optimistic. "We'll turn something up then."

"Will we?" asked Merritt.

Landon paused and made another, more intent study of Merritt's face. The old man's shoulders sagged ever so slightly. "What's wrong, Davey?" he whispered.

"There are no mustangs up here; there isn't one in the whole mountain range."

"You shouldn't get discouraged so quick," said Landon. "You know how it is. This isn't the first time we started out having rotten luck. It'll change, though. You wait and see tomorrow."

"There never was a wild stallion that bothered Circle Dot. Welch knew that and you knew that even before you took the job."

"Davey," the old man said hoarsely, his eyes widening. "What are you saying, Davey?"

"I was jumped by a couple of bushwhackers today," Merritt went on, his voice grim and cold. "I got them, though. They're both dead right now. They were Goodhue and Baker."

THE OLD man's mouth worked but only a choked sound emerged. He started shaking his head, as if in denial and bafflement. His eyes were wide with horror and unbelief.

"Is that why you brought me up here, Wes?" asked Merritt. Despite the anger and hate there was still room for hurt in him. He could feel its knife-edged ache in his heart. "Did you bring me up here to set me up as a target?"

"Oh, no, Davey," the old man moaned. His eyes misted. "How can you talk like that about me?"

"Goodhue didn't die right away," said Merritt. He was surprised that his voice had grown gruff. The pain was heightening in his heart. "He lived long enough to answer some questions for me. He admitted being in on the massacre along with Baker and Tom

Atherton. He also said he had two more partners in that job. He named Ferris Welch—and you!"

For a moment, Landon stood there, stunned. Then his mouth began to work, soundlessly. He spread his hands in a pleading gesture and took a couple of steps ahead. His eyes brimmed with tears. Then all at once his glance went past Merritt and the old man tensed.

"Look out, Davey," he screamed, and went for his gun.

In that instant, Merritt sensed the peril behind him. He saw Landon's .44 Starr sweep up and point at something to his rear. The Starr roared but another shot had preceded it by the tiniest interval. Merritt saw the old man shudder and start to sag.

That was all the attention Merritt could give to Landon, however. Merritt was spinning, his .44 Colt rising in his hand. As he turned he went down on one knee and it was this maneuver that saved him. The bullet emitted a shriek as it passed just over his head.

Then Merritt saw Welch. The big rancher had come up unobserved on foot. He was standing there, spraddle-legged, big and deadly against the sky, a carbine at his shoulder. The long barrel was pointing at Merritt's chest when he fired.

He saw flame whip out of the carbine but it had wavered just at that instant and the slug screamed harmlessly past Merritt. The bullet from Merritt's .44 had slammed into Welch's chest. The force of it staggered him and drove him back a step. The carbine fell away from his shoulder but he recovered and brought it up again. The barrel weaved at first but gradually it steadied.

Merritt fired again.

This slug also tagged Welch in the chest. He groaned and his knees gave way and he went down on them, hard. He started to pitch forward but he managed to get the carbine in front of him, the butt braced against the ground, and he used the weapon, gripping it with both hands, to keep himself from going all the way down. He moaned again, a sibilant retch of pain, and his head came up. Supporting himself with his left hand gripping the carbine, Welch reached with his right for the sixshooter at his side.

MERRITT fired again. He was crying now, from rage and hate and the memory of ten years back and a new one that was only instants old. The slug ripped a shout of agony out of Ferris Welch. The sixshooter fell unfired from his fingers and his head dropped and he started to sag.

The next bullet tore into Welch's stomach and the torture of this flung his head up in a spasmodic reaction. His grimacing mouth was working soundlessly.

Merritt aimed carefully and his next slug smashed into Welch's forehead and passed through his brain. He dropped suddenly then, crumpling limply like an empty sack. He was a twisted muddle of legs and arms as he lay in death.

Merritt's heart pounded as he rose to his feet and went over to where Landon lay on his back on the ground. Merritt knelt beside the old man. Landon must have sensed this for his eyes opened. They blinked twice and then fastened themselves on Merritt.

"Davey," the old man whispered, the color of approaching death in the area around his eyes, "listen to me, Davey. It was all like you said except for one thing. I was in that massacre but we hadn't planned it that way. Me and Atherton thought it was only going to be a stickup; it was Welch and Goodhue and Baker that turned it into the massacre. There would be no witnesses that way, they said."

Landon paused to catch his breath. For a moment it gargled in his throat.

The blood was welling steadily out of the wound in the old man's chest. It made Merritt sick just to look at it. He did not examine it because he knew dully there was no use.

"I felt sorry afterward," the old man resumed, "but it was too late then. I rode back the next morning and found everybody dead except you. So I took you and nursed you. I took you away from here because I didn't want you ever to find out about me. That's why I didn't want you to come back here. That's why I kept begging you to drop it; that's why I brought you up here on this fake mustang hunt."

He reached up a hand and plucked weakly and pleadingly at Merritt's shirt sleeve. Landon coughed once, a gentle rattle deep in his chest, and a bubble of blood appeared on his lips. Then he found his voice again and went on.

"Welch and the others wanted to kill you right there in Bluewater but I told them I'd get you up here on this hunt and maybe a week away from town would make you change your mind. I told them I would work on you and get you to leave the country. They said all right but then they double-crossed me."

He tugged at Merritt's sleeve, eyes bright with pain and entreaty. "I didn't know they meant to bushwhack you, Davey; I didn't know any of them had followed us. Don't you believe me? Don't you believe that of me?"

Merritt remembered how it had been with Welch just moments ago. The old man could have remained silent and Merritt would have had a bullet in the back. But the old man had cried out and had taken a slug in the chest and now he was dying. The hate and rancor were gone from Merritt. His eyes stung. "I believe you, Wes," he said.

The old man's eyes were dimming. His weakening voice was wistful. "I wonder if in time you might come to think of me a little kindly. Could you ever forgive me, Davey?"

"Forgive you?" said Merritt, his throat dry and aching. "I owe my life to you twice. That leaves nothing to forgive; you've more than made up for everything."

The old man appeared to think on this. The conclusion he reached pleased him for a smile touched his tired lips. "Thank you, Davey," he whispered. His eyes fixed themselves on a point far in the sky and he went on staring there with the smile still on his mouth.

A little time elapsed before it dawned on Merritt that the old man was dead...

MERRITT buried the old man under a pile of stones and erected a crude cross at the head of the grave. He left Ferris Welch to the buzzards. Merritt turned the grulla mare loose to fend for itself and then he mounted the buckskin and rode away.

He rode well into the night before stopping to catch some fitful sleep. In the morning he rode on. He was aware that he had changed within. The darkness was gone from his thinking. His heart seemed to have mellowed and grown gentle and this new sensation filled Merritt with awe.

He rode to Box A and Grace Atherton came out into the yard to meet him. He looked down at her sad, haunted eyes and something tender stirred in him.

He told her all that he had learned and all that had happened. "I wanted you to know that your father had no part in the actual killing," he finished. "He got suckered into the deal, like Wes Landon did. When it turned out different, it was too late for them to back out. I thought you might like to know this."

"Thank you," she said, her eyes misting. The sadness seemed to have lifted in them.

"I'm riding north," he said. "I've got a little stake and I figure on buying a ranch. I'd settle down here but there are too many bad memories." He paused and looked at her and his throat tightened somewhat. "The memories aren't any good for you, either. If—if after a while, I sent for you, would you come?"

She smiled then, bright and sparkling though the mist thickened in her eyes. "I'd like to see anybody try to stop me," she whispered happily. "I'd just like to see them try to stop me. . . ."

★

WHEN LADY GODIVA WENT WEST!

Special Feature by Bart Liddell

ACCORDING to the old English Legend, Lady Godiva was a gal with a lot of guts. Her husband, Earl Leofric of Mercia, was a tough hombre; he needed money, and levied a heavy tax upon the people in his domain. Somehow—the records aren't clear on this point—a deal took place. Lady Godiva was to ride through the town of Coventry clad only in her long golden hair. In return said husband would cancel the tax.

The good people, and even those not so good, were given fair warning to stay indoors, and keep windows and doors closed. The brave dame rode a horse, without a saddle, through the town. One non-gallant guy took a peep; hence we get the expression, "Peeping Tom." According to the rest of the tale, he was struck blind for not being a gentleman. The tax was lifted and all was well.

Now just suppose Lady Godiva tried that stunt in Abilene, or in Dodge City. Picture our hero, with a sixgun in each hand speaking to the boys in the *Last Chance Saloon:* "If any one of you bats an eye, I'll blast it out!"

It happened in a rip-snortin' western town called Ellsworth. In the year 1873, this was the destination of the Longhorns. The place lay depressingly flat on the bank of the Smoky Hill River; around the town were miles and miles of fine prairieland with grass to feed the stock.

Since there was money in Ellsworth, that meant gambling, drinking, women, and trouble. For a time Ben and Bill Thompson ran a gambling and saloon concession in Arthur Larkin's Grand Central Hotel. And they also ran the town. They were going to clash with Wyatt Earp.

But on this particular evening, a dame by the name of Praire Rose was in a daring mood. Maybe she had too much to drink, or perhaps the wild life was getting too tame for her. Perhaps a cowboy teased her. For from her mouth came a challenge: "Bet anyone fifty dollars I'll walk down the main street of this town without anything on me!"

It certainly was a dilemma for the cowboys. To ignore the challenge was not a gallant thing; to accept it was equally as ungallant.

"Bet you fifty you don't dare," accepted one of the cowboys.

Bets were covered. And when the sun rose the next morning, Praire Rose was Lady Godiva! Dressed exactly in the same outfit as that English dame, our western gal walked slowly and proudly down the main street of Ellsworth. But with one difference: In each hand she held a sixshooter. "I'll blast out the eye of any skunk that dares to peep," she shouted.

Maybe they had heard of Peeping Tom and what happened to him. Anyway, no bullets were fired and all eyes remained intact— Which means, of course, that not a soul was on the street, or even dared to take look.

Net Result?

Praire Rose collected.

★

Garson had used a number of tricks to kill the men on his list of victims. Now Pete Holden's only chance was to think up one that Garson wouldn't expect.

TO TRAP A KILLER

by WILLIAM F. SCHWARTZ

SHORTY KING said, soberly, "Hank Garson's a killer all right. He's gunned down two men in the county already. And he says you're next on his list."

Pete Holden asked, "How do you know this?" He was rolling a cigaret as he spoke. He had been branding a calf on his tiny spread when Shorty rode up on a sorrel gelding. But that chore was completed now and the calf had gone bawling, with its fresh Circle C mark, into the small herd of Herefords, seeking its mother. "How do you know this—that Garson says I'm next on his list?"

"I was over in Benton," Shorty explained, "the day before yesterday

"Garson usually has some kind of trick handy."

when Garson killed Les Clooney. I heard Garson say it himself. After Garson shot Clooney, he went into the *Golden Eagle Saloon* and had a couple of drinks. Part of the crowd that watched the gun duel between Garson and Clooney went into the *Golden Eagle,* too. I was in the crowd. I heard Garson say, real loud to the bartender, purposely loud enough for everybody in the saloon to hear him, 'I'm gonna get that son Pete Holden next. He's next on my list.' "

Holden was silent for a moment. He took two puffs on his cigaret and gravely considered the burning end of it.

"You saw the gun duel, too?" Holden asked, finally. "What happened?"

"Garson killed Clooney with a trick," Shorty said.

"A trick?"

"Yeh. A trick."

"How?"

"Well," Shorty said, "Garson sent word to Clooney that he wanted to meet him outside the *Golden Eagle Saloon* and that Clooney should be ready to shoot on sight. Clooney was down the street at the time, buyin' some stuff at the Mercantile. Soon as Clooney got the word, he left the stuff with a friend. Then he came walkin' up the street toward the *Golden Eagle.* By that time, the street was cleared. There was nobody in sight, just Clooney walkin' up the street to meet his death.

"Me and a couple of other fellers were in Baxter's place—you know, the gunsmith's. We were lookin' out the window, watchin' Clooney come up the street. There were a lot of heads at other windows on Main Street, too;

and everybody was ready to duck back once the bullets started to fly.

"Clooney came straight up the street and waited outside the *Golden Eagle* for Garson, who was still inside the saloon. Finally, the batwings on the *Golden Eagle* shoved open and Garson came out. Garson had a .45 in a holster tied to his right thigh. Garson was holdin' his right hand out in front of him, like he was ready to drop it on his gun. But Garson's left hand was behind his back so nobody, especially Clooney, couldn't see it.

"'You ready?' Garson called out to Clooney.

"Clooney yelled back, 'Yeh!' and went for his sixshooter.

"But Clooney never got his sixshooter free from its holster. Because Garson's right hand didn't go for the .45 he was wearin' on his right thigh. Instead, Garson pulled his left hand out from behind his back. There was a .45 in that hand, too. Garson blazed away at Clooney with his left-hand gun and Clooney fell dead in the street. Clooney didn't have a chance. He never figured, I guess, that Garson was carryin' an extra .45 behind his back."

PETE HOLDEN cursed softly to himself. "Garson won't pull that one on me; I'll be ready for that stunt if he tried to pull it again."

Shorty sighed. "You're right, Pete. Garson won't try that again. That hombre's too slick to try the same stunt twice. I talked to a feller from over at Canyon City, a drummer who was there when Garson shot Stan Martin in Canyon City last week. This drummer told me Garson killed Martin by a trick, too. But a different one."

"Yeh?" Holden probed.

"This drummer," Shorty related, "said Garson met Martin on the street and told him to draw. Garson wasn't wearin' no holster this time. Instead, he had a .45 stuck in his belt, right in the middle of his belly. The handle of the .45 was pointed toward Garson's right hand like he favored a right hand draw. This time, too, Garson had his right hand out in front of him. His left hand was near his belt.

"From the angle Garson's gun handle was pointin', you'd figure he'd go for the .45 with his right hand. But he didn't. He drew with his left. And it sure fooled Martin, the way the drummer explained it to me. Martin, it seems, was watchin' Garson's right hand; it cost Martin maybe a second or two before he realized what Garson was doin'—goin' for the .45 with his left hand like that. And them seconds cost Martin his life. Martin, I hear, was pretty fast on the draw. But Garson sure out-foxed—or maybe I should say out-skunked— Martin with that tricky way of gettin' his gun out.

"So you see what you're up against, Pete. You ain't got no ordinary gunman after you. You got a killer to face—a killer with plenty of tricks up his sleeve. A lowdown polecat who'll use any lowdown trick in the book to do a killin'."

Pete Holden made no comment for a moment. He dropped his cigaret, crushed it under the heel of his boot. "Thanks for the information, Shorty," he said, finally. "Thanks. Maybe you saved my life. I'll be ready for Garson when he comes after me."

"Then you intend to meet him, Pete? In a gun duel?"

Holden nodded. "I do. You see, Shorty, Garson got a hatred for me—for the same reason he had a hatred for Clooney and Martin. The three of us sent him to prison about five years ago. Garson was brandin' some yearlings that wasn't his; and we caught him red-handed at it. Maybe we shoulda hanged him then. But we gave him a chance because he was young; we sent him to prison instead. Now he's come back after us. Somebody—

probably some gunslinger he met in prison—must have smartened him up, taught him about those tricks to use in a gun duel."

"But what are yuh gonna do, Pete?" Shorty wanted to know. "Surely you ain't gonna try to out-shoot that polecat in a fair fight, are yuh? He's sure to have some new devilment, some new trick, up his sleeve when he meets you."

Holden grinned with his lips, but there was no mirth in his eyes. "Maybe I'll have some trick up my sleeve, too, Shorty."

PETE HOLDEN waited until Shorty King and his sorrel gelding had disappeared in the distance across the rolling Montana prairie. Then he picked up his branding iron again. The iron was cold now. But Holden made a fresh fire of cow chips and heated the iron again. When the iron was hot, he took it in his left hand and rubbed it across the back of his right hand. He gritted his teeth in pain as the hot metal seared his flesh. When he was finished, he examined his right hand. It looked worse than it really was, he decided, as the hand started to blister. But that's the way he wanted it, he told himself.

That afternoon, Pete Holden rode into Grier City, a cowtown a few miles south of the Circle C. His first stop was at the *Silver Dollar Saloon*, where he walked inside and up to the bar.

"Whiskey," he told Joe Spraggs, the scrawny bartender. Then he held up his blistered hand so Joe could see it. "I can sure stand a drink—the way this hand is hurtin' me."

Spraggs eyed Holden's hand. "What happened to you?" he wanted to know.

"Fool accident; I got it brandin' a calf this mornin'. The calf kicked loose and the brandin' iron burned my head. I came into town to have Doc Morgan fix it up."

A few customers edged closer to look at his hand and Holden showed it to them. "It's my gun hand," Holden explained. "And I hear Hank Carson's huntin' for me. It's sure one lousy break." Then he drained his whiskey glass at a gulp, sauntered from the saloon and headed down the street toward the office of Doctor Nate Morgan, who was both a physician and veterinarian.

Doc Morgan examined Pete's hand carefully. "You'll live," Doc grinned. "It's nothing serious. All it needs is some ointment—and maybe a bandage for a day or two.'

"That's what I want!" Holden said. "A bandage! A big bandage." Then he pulled something out of his pocket. "I want you to keep quiet about this, Doc."

After the hand was bandaged, Pete went over to the Ajax Hotel and rented a room for the night. Then he returned to the *Silver Dollar*. Shorty King was there this time. Shorty's eyes widened when he saw the heavy bandage. "What the Hell happened to you?"

Holden repeated the yarn about the kicking calf and the hot branding iron. He narrated the story in loud tones so every customer in the place could hear him.

"And that's your gun hand, too, ain't it?" Shorty said.

"It sure is," Holden told him. " 'Course, I can shoot with my left hand, too. But I'm not fast with it. Never got much practice handlin' a gun with my left hand."

Worry assembled itself on Shorty's wizened face. "You better get out of town, Pete," he whispered. "Garson's sure to hear about this."

Holden made no comment for a moment. But that was what he was hoping, he told himself; that Hank Garson would hear all about his injured and bandaged hand.

"Come on, Shorty," Holden said, fi-

nally. "Step up to the bar. The drinks are on me."

HANK GARSON rode into Grier City the next morning. Pete Holden was eating breakfast in the small restaurant on the ground floor of the Ajax Hotel when the news reached him. It was Shorty King who informed him of Garson's arrival.

"Garson's in town!" Shorty was panting and perspiration glistened on

"You can be sure that Garson will get some advantage."

his face. "He's down at the *Silver Dollar,* lookin' for you. I ran all the way up here to tell you. Pete, you better get out of town—fast. Garson's tellin' everybody he's gonna kill you. He knows all about your hand bein' hurt. He says you must have burned it on purpose to try to get out of a fight with him. But he says he's gonna kill you, anyway."

Holden kept on eating his bacon and eggs. It wasn't an easy job eating with only one hand, he had discovered. But he was managing to accomplish it, even though awkwardly. "Do me a favor, will yuh, Shorty?"

"Sure, Pete. Anythin'."

"Then go back to the *Silver Dol-*

lar," Holden said. "Spread the word around where I am—and make sure Garson hears you. Let him know I'm down here, eatin' my breakfast. If he wants me, he has to come down here after me."

Shorty stared at Holden for a moment.

"You loco or somethin'?" Shorty asked.

"Just do what I told you, Shorty," Holden suggested, quietly.

Shorty frowned. "Okay, Pete. If you want it that way. But I think you're plumb loco!" Then he left the restaurant.

And Holden went back to his bacon and eggs.

Pete Holden didn't have long to wait for Hank Garson. First, Holden heard the murmur of a crowd of people from the street. And he knew what was happening. Garson was coming down after him and the crowd was following Garson; at a safe distance, of course.

Finally, a shadow loomed on the frosted glass door of the restaurant. The door swung open; and Hank Garson stood there, a .45 in a holster tied low on his right thigh.

Holden made certain his left hand was in sight—and busy—when Garson strode into the restaurant. Holden was lifting a mug of coffee to his lips with his left hand. His bandaged right hand lay on the table in front of him. He knew, to Garson, he looked like a sitting duck. But he wanted it that way.

And, because Holden looked like a trapped man, Garson used no trickery this time. A confident leer spread across his face. He yanked out his .45, aimed it pointblank at Holden's chest. "You're number three, Holden!" Garson sneered and started to squeeze the trigger of his .45.

Garson's heavy sixshooter roared loudly in the narrow confines of the restaurant.

BUR GARSON'S shot went wild, because he was staggering backward when he fired. Another gun had crackled first. There was only a dull *pop* as the small derringer that Holden had concealed in the bandage on his right hand erupted smoke and flame.

For a second or two, Garson stared, with unbelieving eyes, at the crimson smear that was spreading across his own chest. Then he tried to lift his .45 for another shot. But his eyes went glassy and he fell, crashing forward on his face, because he could pull the trigger.

Pete Holden stood up from the table and started to unwind the bandage that covered his right hand. By that time, men were pushing into the restaurant through the door that the now dead Hank Garson had left open. Shorty King was among them.

"You tricked him!" Shorty shouted in glee. "You tricked him! Just like the son tricked the other two."

Holden nodded. "There's more than one way to kill a skunk—or to trap a killer."

★

A "Nate Stone" Story

by William F. Schwartz

BLOOD WILL TELL OF MURDER

appears in the March issue of

SMASHING DETECTIVE STORIES

THE TRADING POST

Department of Fictional Folklore

BEAR BUSCOE - CATTLE MAN

by Harold Gluck

YOU CITY FOLKS must be plumb daffy in the upper story when it comes to eat steak. One of them editors what likes to hear about my pal, Bear Buscoe, took me for a big spread. Five cartwheels he gives for a small hunk of meat they call a steak. Why back in them good old days on the open range you could buy a lot of meat for that kind of money. And some of the fellows I knowed never paid for their herds. You call 'em artists and we called them rustlers. Just helped themselves to the other man's cattle.

In them books about the West they tell you that the Longhorn is gone from the range. But nary a word about the Twisted Horn. Now that was a breed for you. My pal, Bear Buscoe started it back in the 1870's. We wuz spending some time on the LC ranch owned by Tim Jennings. Now Tim was a city man who came out with some money in his pocket. Bear Buscoe, with that big heart of his, was showin' young Tim a thing or two about ranching. Well, it all happened on this bright Tuesday morning.

Young Tim is talkin' to his foreman, Butch Davis, when a big Longhorn goes right for Tim. It would have gored him into a bloody mess if my pal, Bear Buscoe, hadn't been so quick. Before you could say Jim Dandy, Bear Buscoe twists the horns of the critter around and then throws the blasted animal on the ground.

"Learn you a lesson to be nice to city folks," was all my pal said.

I swear you could have seen tears coming from the eyes of that ex-Longhorn. He turned around and slinked away. Young Tim tried to thank my pal, but he brushed it off.

"Wuz nuttin'," replied Bear Buscoe.

We were a-plannin' on headin' east the next morning and sure when the sun comes up, we gits up too. Had a quick breakfast but it took some time for Bear Buscoe to eat his 76 flapjacks, 38 eggs, 92 slices of bacon, seven loaves of bread, and fifteen cups of coffee. He just didn't have an appetite that morning. Well when we goes outside, what a sight for our eyes!

There is this Twisted Horn critter with every head of stock behind him. Big Bear goes up and the two talk awhile. Shucks, did I forget to say that everybody out West knowed how my pal can talk to all the animals. Well this lingo goes on for about a spell of ten minutes. Then I heared what it was about.

"Them other Longhorns is jealous, and wants their horns a-twisted the same way. Go tell Tim the news."

All the cowboys lined up to see the sight. Young Tim had one of those new-fangled cameras from the east. So help me, he took piktures, but later he said he forgot to put in what they call film. One by one them steer come up to my pal. Each critter bends down on his knees. Bear Buscoe gives one fast jerk and the horns go the other way. Took him all morning to do that job. He had a way of doing it so the critter felt no pain.

When we left you should have seen the way them proud Twisted Horns waved their tails in gratitude. Young

[*Turn To Page* 78]

The mystery was—why was Val Cadogan so confident he could get away with open murder?

DARK ALIBI

Judge Steele Story

by LON WILLIAMS

JUDGE WARDLOW STEELE, urged by uncommon savagery, shoved Flat Creek's court machinery through its preliminaries and in short order got down to what he called nut-cracking. That business was People *versus* Val Cadogan, one of numerous aliases. Charge, first-degree murder. Big Jerd Buckalew, sheriff; skinny Clerk James Skiffington; deputies and Vigies were on hand, ready for eventualities, if needed.

"Claybrook, call fust witness."

Wade Claybrook, prosecuting attorney, stocky and redheaded, got up and nodded at a deputy. "Call Oss Remine."

Sitting at Claybrook's table, Steele observed with satisfaction, were dapper French Demeree and stout Lexicon Hutto, teaming up with law and order for a change.

Opposite them was a newcomer, a big character with dark, swept-back hair and a high-cheeked, clean-shaved, middle-aged face, who'd given his name as Telfair Brinkerstaff. A new kind of criminal was being tried, too—a darkly-handsome, expensively-dressed baboon, with eyes that suggested unusual craft and viciousness.

Witness Remine came in and took his seat. He was mild-mannered, grave; he glanced nervously at defendant Cadogan.

Claybrook eyed him casually. "You are Oss Remine?"

"Yes."

"A merchant in Flat Creek?"

"Yes."

"Have you recently been called upon by one or more well-dressed strangers who demanded that you pay them money in return for their leaving you and your business unmolested?"

Telfair Brinkerstaff got up. "Sir, this defendant has not been indicted for piracy, extortion or blackmail; that question should not be answered."

"If your honor please," said Claybrook, "those crimes go hand in hand with murder. It has been so since Roman times, perhaps earlier. *Extortion is* comprehensively defined them. Extortionists operate through fear of death, inspired in their victims. That fear is effective because murder is not only a threat, but also a reality; what we would show here is that in Flat Creek there existed a pattern of extortion and crime in conformity with its worst and age-old traditions."

"A fine speech," sneered Brinkerstaff. "But I suggest that if Mr. Claybrook intends to testify, he first be sworn."

"Brink, set down," said Steele.

"I demand to be heard, sir; you've no right to refuse that demand."

At a nod from Steele, three deputies seized Brink and set him down.

"When you're told to do something in this court, Brink, it ain't idle talk," Steele reminded him. "Proceed, Wade."

"Mr. Remine," Wade asked, "where

The two could have been twins.

have you seen Val Cadogan before now?"

"Remine said nervously, This Cadogan came into my store and says to me, 'Remine I understand you had a visitor, last week, a gentleman who mentioned something about—uh—let us say, *rent.*' I says to him, 'Sir, I own this store. Therefore, I don't have to pay rent.' And he says, 'If your store got burned down, you wouldn't own any store, would you?' And I says, 'If my store is burned down, I'll know who burned it.' And he says, 'If you tell anybody who burned it, assuming you know, you will be killed—you and maybe your family.' "

"Did you pay him this so-called rent?" asked Claybrook.

Remine, ashamed, hung his head. "I did."

"That's all," said Claybrook.

"Brink," said Steele, "want to cross-examine?"

DEFENDANT'S lawyer got up cautiously. "No, but I move that this entire testimony be stricken as wholly irrelevant."

"Overruled. Call next witness, Claybrook."

Claybrook called them, one after another, until a procession of convincing proportions had gone by.

To Claybrook's questions whether they were acquainted with Val Cadogan, all responded affirmatively. They had been threatened by him; they had

paid rent; they had been afraid to talk; they were aware that other men had been killed; they lived in fear of their lives.

Witness George Presley, mine superintendent, was asked, "Were you acquainted with Angus Paul?"

Presley, middle-aged, tall, of determined demeanor, replied, "Well acquainted, sir."

Claybrook asked "What basis existed for your acquaintanceship?"

"He was book-keeper at our commissary. I saw him almost daily."

"Did he ever mention Val Cadogan to you?"

"Object," shouted Brinkerstaff. "He may not ask leading questions."

Deputy sheriffs watched for a sign from Steele. Receiving none, they relaxed.

Claybrook said, "I shall ask another question, your honor, instead of that."

"Don't let Brink scare you, Wade."

"He won't, your honor." Claybrook faced Presley. "Are you acquainted with Val Cadogan?"

"No."

"Would you recognize him, if you saw him?"

"No."

"Do you know whether Angus Paul was acquainted with Cadogan?"

"Angus mentioned his name."

"On what occasion?"

"Do you mean under what circumstances?"

"Yes."

Presley organized his thoughts. "You want it briefly, I presume?"

"Right."

"Angus came to me privately some five or six hours before he was killed. He was considerably upset and scared."

Brinkerstaff started to get up. Steele lifted his eyebrows at Sheriff Buckalew, who lifted eyebrows at his deputies. Brinkerstaff sat down quickly.

"Proceed," said Claybrook.

"As I was saying, Angus was perturbed. He said—"

"Object," Brinkerstaff shouted without rising. "That's hearsay."

Claybrook said to Presley, "Do you understand what hearsay evidence means?"

Presley smiled wryly. "I'm afraid I don't."

Claybrook nodded. "Perhaps Mr. Brinkerstaff can explain what it means?"

Brinkerstaff got up warily. "Sir, it is not my duty to educate opposing counsel, but if I must—"

"Brink, set down," Steele growled. "Claybrook's only making a monkey of you. Don't help him."

Claybrook returned to Presley. "Without quoting Angus Paul, will you explain why you said Angus was upset and scared."

"May I quote myself?"

"Certainly."

PRESLEY NODDED appreciatively. "It was apparent to me that Angus had something serious on his mind. I said to him, 'Angus, you look like you're in trouble. Are you?' Angus nodded to indicate that he was. I said, 'What is it?' He replied in substance that he had been approached by a sinister character who demanded money—company money. I said, 'How much did he want?' Angus explained that he wanted only a percent. I said, 'Did he explain how you were to manage that percent in his favor?' Angus explained what system he was expected to follow—a cleverly-designed scheme of embezzlement which included entering of fictitious names on our company payroll. I said, 'What did you tell him, Angus?' "

Brinkerstaff had eased up. "Sir, I object."

"State your objection," growled Steele.

"This witness is giving hearsay evidence and calling it something else."

"What is he calling it, Brink?"

"I don't know."

"Then why do you say he's calling it something else?"

Claybrook intervened. "Mr. Brinkerstaff seems a bit confused, your honor. I suggest that Mr. Presley be permitted to give direct quotations. It is apparent that his statements as to Angus Paul's responses are couched in more damaging language than Angus likely used."

Steele glared at Brinkerstaff. "Want it as was, Brink?"

"I think it would be preferable, sir," Brinkerstaff replied and sat down.

"Proceed, Mr. Presley," said Claybrook.

Presley resumed, "When I asked Angus what he told this clever sidewinder, he said, 'I told him to get his polecat smell out of my presence and keep it out. This stinker twisted up one side of his lip and said, "All right, smart boy, if that's how you want it, that's how you'll get it. How would you like to have your pretty wife kidnaped and held for a few thousand in gold, or maybe strangled?" When he said that, Mr. Presley, I got different ideas about things; I promised to go along with his idea. This skunk said to me then, "Now you're getting smart, *Mister* Paul. I'll be seeing you in one week." But I was only stalling, Mr. Presley,' Angus said."

Brinkerstaff got up. "I think he'd better quit these hearsay quotes. This name-calling—"

"You're overruled, Brink," snapped Steele. "Go ahead, Presley."

Presley continued, "I said to Angus, 'You acted wisely, young man. My first thought is, this skunk's got nerve; what's his name?' Angus answered, 'He gave his name as Val Cadogan.' 'Do you know where he can be found?" Angus answered, 'I know what he said. He said he could be found, when at all, at Cooksy Blair's saloon.' 'What else did he tell you?' I asked. That was where Angus looked pale and said, 'This dressed-up snake said he'd kill me if I talked—said he might even kill my wife, too. He said he had confederates who stayed under cover and would kill me, if he failed to do so himself. He said he preferred doing his own killings, because he liked to watch his victims cringe and beg before he knifed or shot them.' I promised Angus I'd work quietly until Cadogan was in jail. Unfortunately, some spy must have been watching Angus. You know what happened."

"We shall come to that," said Claybrook. "No more questions."

Steele glared at Brinkerstaff. "Cross-examine?"

Brinkerstaff got up. "No."

PRESLEY was replaced by a young woman dressed in black. She was slender, pretty, nervous and pale.

Claybrook began, "Your name, please?"

"Theta Paul."

"Your husband was Angus Paul?"

"Yes."

"Are you acquainted with Val Cadogan?"

"I have seen him."

"Do you see him now?"

She nodded toward defendant Cadogan. "He is sitting there."

"Where else have you seen him?"

"At our home—our cottage, where Angus and I lived."

"Now," said Claybrook firmly, "will you start there and relate what took place at your home—everything that was said and done."

Here was something to Judge Steele's notion. He believed in allowing a witness to talk, especially one who was on his side.

Theta held a handkerchief. She twisted nervously. "He said he would have me killed if I accused him."

"Who said that?"

"Val Cadogan."

Steele leaned toward her. "Lady, that baboon is going to be a corpse before this day's over; tell what you know."

Theta sighed. "If I can."

"This court needs your help," said Steele. "We've got to keep up appearances around hyar."

She showed that she had courage. "Angus and I were at home. It was Thursday night. I was sewing. Angus was reading a book, studying to be a mining engineer. There was a knock at our door. A voice that sounded friendly said, 'Angus, you there?' Angus thought he recognized it as a call from Mr. Presley. Unsuspecting, he answered, 'Just a moment, Mr. Presley.'

"But Angus was wrong. Val Cadogan stepped in. He had changed his voice. 'Cadogan!' my husband gasped. 'Val Cadogan!' 'Sure,' Cadogan snarled at one end of his lips. 'Sure, I'm Cadogan. You had a talk with Presley, didn't you?'

"Angus was scared, but he stood up to him. 'Yes,' he said, 'I talked to Mr. Presley. I told him about your visit and scheme to extort money. If you care anything about your life, you'll leave town and do it right away.' Cadogan sneered, 'No,' it's you who's leaving.' Suddenly he had a gun in his hand. 'It don't pay to disobey Val Cadogan. That goes for your pretty wife, too. If she informs against me, I'll kill her. It won't be quick and easy with her, like it's going to be with you.'

"I tried to scream for help, but I couldn't. I couldn't say a word. But I saw Angus—saw him tense for a rush at Cadogan. But Cadogan saw him, too, and guessed his intentions. He—"

A sob choked her.

"What did Cadogan do?" Steele asked gruffly.

His stout voice gave her needed strength. "He shot Angus—shot him twice."

That was as far as she could go.

Claybrook sat down. "No more questions."

BRINKERSTAFF got up. "I'd like to cross-examine this witness."

"I reckon that's part of it, by thunder."

"It certainly is, sir." Brinkerstaff stayed at his table. "Young woman, at what time of night did that visitor appear at your home?"

Theta hesitated, appeared to sense that her answer might be of tremendous importance. She said slowly, "By our clock, it was twenty minutes after eight."

"You are sure of that?"

"Yes."

"What fixed it so definitely in your mind?"

"*He* did; Cadogan glanced at our clock when he came in. I looked, too, and—. Well, that clock formed a picture in my mind. Twenty minutes after eight. I can't forget it. Twenty minutes after eight. Twenty minutes—. It haunts me, stares at me. Twenty minutes—."

"That is all," said Brinkerstaff. He sat down quite pleased.

A deputy gave Theta his arm and escorted her back out of sight.

Claybrook said, "That is presently our case, your honor, though we may have rebuttal evidence, if needed."

"It certainly will be needed," sneered Brinkerstaff.

Steele turned angry eyes upon defense counsel. "You got witnesses?"

Brinkerstaff replied arrogantly, "Indeed, sir. Call Mr. Tobin."

A stout, round-headed man of about forty was brought in and seated. He was bald, except for one hair that stuck almost straight up.

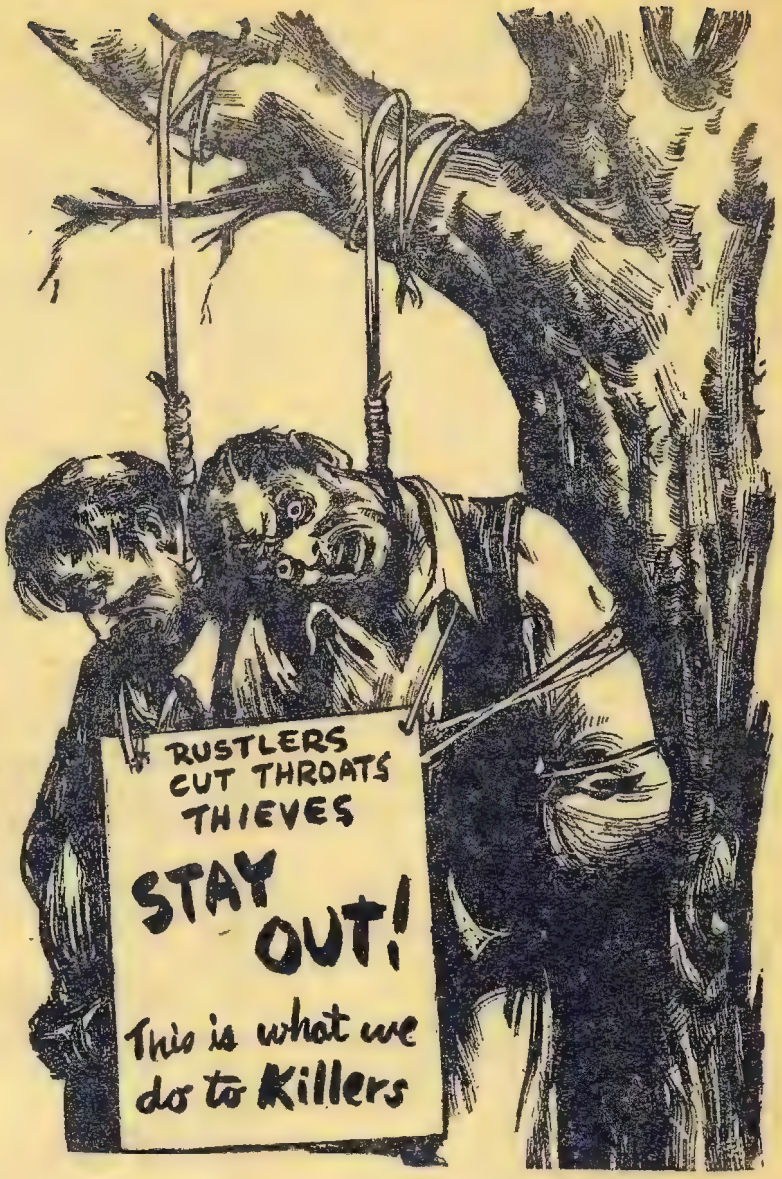
"Your name?" asked Brinkerstaff.

"Tobin."

"Your business?"

"Bartender at Cooksy Blair's sa-

There were times when Judge Steele yearned for the old Vigilante days, when no sly lawyers stood between any varmint and justice.



loon."

"Acquainted with defendant Val Cadogan?"

"I am, sir."

"Have you an independent recollection of whether or not he was at Cooksy Blair's saloon on Thursday evening of last week?"

"He was there."

"Between what hours?"

"From around seven o'clock until shortly after nine. In fact, he was there until a deputy sheriff came in and arrested him."

"Did you hear why he was being arrested?"

"On accusation of murdering Angus Paul."

"That's all." Brinkerstaff sat down.

Claybrook got up. "Your honor, at this point Mr. Demeree will take charge as assisting prosecutor. This shift is made because it has been Mr. Demeree who worked out our procedure as to cross-examination and what we hope will be exposure of a vicious conspiracy against honest citizens."

"Call your next witness," Steele snapped at Brinkerstaff.

"Manny Hozmann," said Brinkerstaff.

Hozmann was brought in. He was tall, blond and hard looking.

"Your name?" asked Brinkerstaff.

"Manfried Hozmann."

"Are you acquainted with Val Cadogan?"

"Sure."

"Where were you last Thursday evening from about seven o'clock until around nine o'clock?"

"I was having a card game at Cooksy Blair's saloon."

"Was Val Cadogan there?"

"Sure he was—all evening, until a deputy picked him up."

"By *all evening*, you have reference to what hours?"

"From around seven until shortly after nine."

"Was he out of your sight at any time between those hours?"

"Maybe for half a minute or so." Hozmann shrugged. "You know how that is; a man has to step out for a minute once in a while."

"That's all."

STEELE had begun to worry. Here was a varmint who was going to get away, unless something desperate was done. He turned hopeful eyes upon French Demeree. "Consarn you, Demeree, when you're defending cutthroats and robbers, you're mighty clever and quick to object. Now that you're on our side, don't think you can let down and take things easy. Skin 'em alive."

Demeree had got up. He responded with quiet dignity. "If your honor please, I never take things easy, no matter whose side I'm on. As for this occasion, I deem it a privilege to devote such talents as I have to ridding society of a nest of snakes."

"Demeree, by thunder, it does me good to hear you talk that way. Go to it."

Demeree stepped forward and confronted Manny Hozmann. "You said you were acquainted with Val Cadogan, I believe?"

"Sure, I said it."

"Are you also acquainted with Cadogan's lawyer, who calls himself Telfair Brinkerstaff?"

Brinkerstaff roared up. "That's a nefarious insinuation. I call myself by my true name, and I demand to be properly respected as an attorney at this bar."

"Proper respect," said Demeree, "is relative and a term of elastic meaning. Proper respect for a scoundrel may shape itself into a hangrope."

Steele was elated. Privately it was his own opinion that Brink was a low-type rascal. "Set down thar, Brinker, and keep quiet. Go ahead, Demeree."

Demeree arched his eyebrows at Hozmann. "Are you acquainted with one Gus Giddings, who calls himself Telfair Brinkerstaff?"

"I know Telfair Brinkerstaff."

"How long have you been acquainted with him?"

Brinkerstaff started to get up, but panic struck him.

Hozmann hesitated. "I don't know."

"See hyar," growled Steele. "You give a right answer when you're asked a question."

"Answer," said Demeree

"About five years."

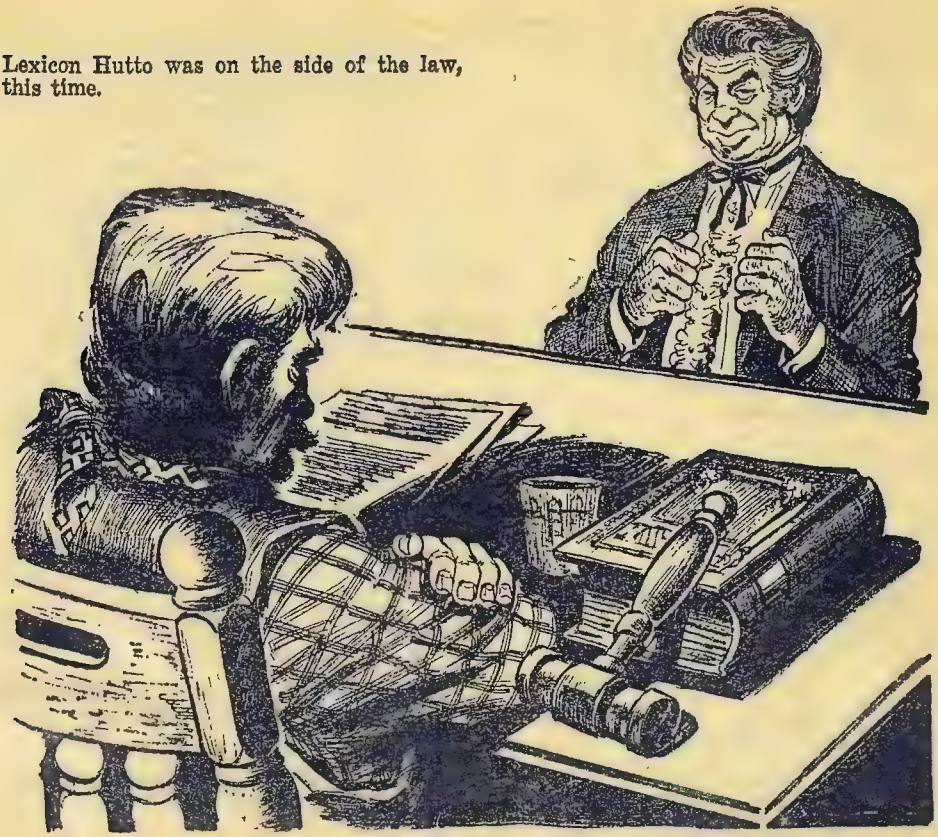
"Where did you first meet him?"

"Where?"

"Yes, where?"

Hozmann looked at Brinkerstaff, then at Steele. "I first met him in Illinois state prison; we was jailbirds together."

Lexicon Hutto was on the side of the law, this time.



"And he's also known as Gus Giddings?"

"Sure."

"Where did you first meet this thug who calls himself Val Cadogan?"

"Same place."

Demeree backed away and stood at his table." Your honor, if I may do so without appearing presumptious, I suggest that this witness be taken into custody as an accomplice in murder."

Brinkerstaff sprang up. "I object. This man is a witness. You can't arrest a witness; he's privileged while attending court in such capacity."

Steele nodded at Sheriff Buckalew. "Take Hozmann to jail."

Buckalew nodded to a couple of deputies. They handcuffed Hozmann and took him out.

Steele glared at Brinkerstaff. "Next witness, Brink."

"I don't have any more."

Demeree arose. "He has two other witnesses, your honor, ex-convicts who call themselves Trigger Wingo and Caleb Battle."

Brinkerstaff looked for an avenue of escape. He said nervously, "Defendant can decline to call as many witnesses as he pleases."

"Very well," said Demeree, "but Wingo and Battle should also be arrested as accomplices in murder."

"Arrest 'em, Bucky."

Buckalew gave an appropriate nod.

"Now," said Demeree, "we have a rebuttal witness." He nodded at a deputy. "Tell Dan Trewhitt to bring in his man."

THERE WAS a rustle. Necks twisted. Through a door behind Buckalew a deputy entered. He was almost seven feet tall and weighed two hundred-fifty pounds. He had in his custody a prisoner whose hands were fettered behind his back. When he had his man in

full view of judge, jurors and spectators, he turned him toward Demeree.

"Here he is, Mr. Demeree."

"Your honor," said Demeree, "we invite court and jurors to look at this man." He waited until surprise had settled into something more solid, then said, "Have him sworn as a witness, Dan."

Trewhitt faced him toward Clerk Skiffington. "Sorry he can't hold up his right hand, Mr. Skiffington, but I've got his thumb stuck up."

Skiffington went through his rigmarole, and Trewhitt seated his man as a witness.

Demeree eyed him coolly for a moment then asked with fierce scorn, "Who are you?"

There was silence, then a surly response. "I'm Val Cadogan."

Defendant Cadogan sprang up. "That's a lie. *I'm* Val Cadogan."

Steele tugged slowly at his mustache. He'd heard it said there were no two people alike, no two leaves or blades of grass alike. He'd never believed such talk. Now he was convinced of its substantial fallacy, for here were two men so alike that he could not have told one from another.

Witness Cadogan said, "I'm Val Cadogan, and I can prove it."

"I can prove he's a liar," screamed Defendant Cadogan. "He's worse than a liar; he's a rotten double-crosser, and if I ever get a chance I'll kill him."

Witness Cadogan said, "I am Val Cadogan; he is only my double."

"Where did you two get acquainted with each other?" asked Demeree.

"In Illinois state prison."

"And in this criminal scheme you were carrying on in Flat Creek, one of you stayed at Cooksy Blair's saloon to establish an alibi for his double, while his double committed murders. "Right?"

"I stayed at Cooksy's."

"That's a lie," shouted Defendant Cadogan. "*I* stayed at Cooksy's, while *he* done those murders."

"That's enough," growled Steele; "we'll hang 'em both. But take 'em out and hold 'em till called for. We're going to find out which is which."

Deputies took both of them out.

Demeree said, "Your honor, I think Mrs. Paul can identify her husband's murderer. Not that it is of vital importance, however. Defendant Cadogan is charged in two counts, one with murder, one with being an accessory to murder; he will hang in any event. But it is important to keep a correct record. For convenience we shall refer to these doubles as Defendant Cadogan and Witness Cadogan."

"Fetch Mrs. Paul," said Steele.

She was brought back and seated again as a witness.

DEMEREE explained their problem. "It appears, Mrs. Paul, that there are two Val Cadogans, surprisingly alike. In order to keep this proceeding regular, we need an identification of your husband's murderer. Do you have any suggestion as to how that can be done?"

She thought for a moment. "Yes, Mr. Demeree. If you will have each one separately come in and stand in front of me and answer your questions, I think I can tell which one did it. If you will ask questions that have something to do with *time*, that might help. Our clock said twenty minutes after eight—twenty minutes after eight." Theta Paul paled until there was no color in her face. She put a hand over her eyes. "Oh, that old clock! It's like a vulture, its two wings drooping. Twenty minutes—." She choked and sobbed.

Demeree observed her with a touch of admiration, then nodded to his left. "Tell Dan Trewhitt to bring in his prisoner."

Presently Theta was staring at Witness Cadogan.

"What's all this got to do with me?" he demanded surlily.

Steele gave him a look of savage fer-

ocity. "It means you're about to be hung, by thunder. Proper answers to questions might earn you a few days of grace, but lying will put a rope around your neck pronto."

Demeree nodded at Trewhitt. "See that he faces Mrs. Paul while he talks." When Trewhitt had Witness Cadogan in correct position, Demeree stood beside Theta. "Sir, it has been testified here that Val Cadogan was at Cooksy Blair's saloon all last Thursday evening. Were you at Cooksy Blair's all that evening?"

"Sure I was."

Demeree faced Judge Steele. "Your honor, this humble servant recognizes that lawyers do not stand too well with this court, but you have just witnessed a splendid gesture of magnanimity on Mr. Claybrook's part. It occurred when he turned matters over to me for further handling. I would be no less magnanimous than he. Accordingly, at this point I should like for Mrs. Paul to take charge of further prosecution. It is she, not I, who deserves most credit for unmasking these scoundrels."

Steele fumed with hot anger, "Consarn you lawyers, you're always dealing in mysteries. What in tarnation are you up to now?"

"If your honor is pleased to be indulgent, events will justify themselves."

"Demeree, you stay right thar. If she needs help, give it."

Demeree nodded. "Yes, your honor. I shall render all necessary assistance." He nodded at Theta. "Proceed, Mrs. Paul."

Theta looked intently at this hard-faced mug who claimed he had been at

Cooksy Blair's when her husband was murdered. This was her moment for retribution and revenge. She said with a voice full of hatred, "Are you Cadogan?"

His upper lip rose noticeably higher on its left than on its right. "Sure, I'm Cadogan."

Suddenly Theta's countenance filled with vengeful fire. When restored composure permitted her to continue, she said, "You were at Cooksy Blair's all evening last Thursday?"

Cadogan turned a searching look toward where Brinkerstaff had been. "Where's my lawyer?"

"*Your* lawyer?" said Steele.

"I mean *his* lawyer."

"*Your* lawyer has slipped out," Steele told him coldly. "He's probably hung by now."

Cadogan showed panic. "I don't have to answer this woman's questions. I got a right to have a lawyer."

Steele glanced at Sheriff Buckalew. "Get a rope ready, Bucky."

"Got it right here, Judge."

Cadogan looked scared. "What was that question?"

Theta said, "Were you at Cooksy Blair's saloon all of last Thursday evening?"

"Sure, I was."

"Then how did it happen that another Val Cadogan was arrested, instead of you?"

That jarred him, but he recovered quickly. "I reckon you can't trip me on that. There was two Val Cadogans."

THETA LOWERED her face slightly and stared at him coldly. "But one of those Val Cadogans was out committing a murder. I can tell you what actually happened. This Cadogan at Cooksy's stayed until he got a signal that his double had killed Angus Paul. Then he slipped out and stayed long enough for them to have swapped places. Did they swap?"

Witness Cadogan's countenance brightened. "Sure, they did. When it comes to having sense, you're a smart girl."

Theta looked her scorn. "When you and my husband's murderer swapped places outside Cooksy Blair's, did he tell you at exactly what time he killed Angus Paul?"

"Sure."

"At what time was it?"

"Twenty minutes after eight."

"By whose time?"

"Yours. By that clock on your mantel."

Theta's expression changed from scorn to mockery. "How could that be when it was at exactly eight-twenty that you and your double swapped places?"

His upper lip raised again irregularly. "I thought you was a smart woman, but I change my mind."

Steele's impatience flared. "By thunder, Demeree, why don't you say something?"

"Your honor," Demeree replied quietly, "Dan Trewhitt has been working on this matter of *time* ever since Angus Paul was murdered. He has a witness who knows that one of those so-called Cadogans slipped out of Cooksy's at exactly eight-twenty, and that he or another came back inside two minutes later. You see, Sheriff Buckalew's office has not been asleep."

"That's right, Judge," said Dan. "We've got these extortioning monkeys sewed up in a sack."

Demeree nodded at Theta. "Proceed, Mrs. Paul."

Her expression shaded into contempt as she eyed Witness Cadogan. "You and your double swapped places at eight-twenty, and your double was arrested at five minutes after nine."

A sneer of triumph spread over Cadogan's mouth. "Sure, babe, you got it right now. When officers arrested my double, they got Angus Paul's killer. Lady, you fixed my alibi perfect."

"Except for two things," said Theta. "There's a picture in my mind I can never forget. When my husband's murderer came into our home and Angus exclaimed, 'Cadogan!', an upper lip rose in a sneer on its left side and a sneering voice replied, 'Sure, I'm Cadogan.'" Theta paused. There was an audience hush that gave Flat Creek's court room an empty, haunted air. Theta then glanced up. "Judge, if it's all right, I'd like for Mr. Demeree to explain from here."

FOR ONCE in his judicial career, Steele felt that it was a pleasure to be a judge. Now he had everything on his side, including French Demeree. "All right, Demeree, start explaining."

"Mrs. Paul," Demeree asked, "at what time was your husband killed?"

"At fifteen minutes before nine, by correct time."

Demeree stepped down and faced Steele. "Your honor, Witness Cadogan is in a most extraordinary dilemma. He could not have been at Cooksy Blair's saloon all evening, otherwise it would have been he who was arrested. It can be proved that one Cadogan was at Cooksy's until eight-twenty. At that time a swap could have occurred. This ape, Witness Cadogan, says there was a swap. If so, Witness Cadogan murdered Angus Paul, for Angus was not murdered until fifteen minutes before nine. Witness Cadogan is caught on one prong or another of his dilemma. Paul's murderer could have been no one but him."

"Demeree," said Steele, "you still leave me curious. What did that clock have to do with anything?"

"That old clock, your honor, was just an heirloom. It hadn't tick-tocked once in years. Cadogan saw its hands, drooping, as Mrs. Paul has so aptly said, like a vulture's wings at eight-twenty. For Cadogan, they drooped not in time, but in prophecy."

Judge Steele saw at last what a splendid job had been accomplished. In one way he felt cheated—he couldn't hang Witness Cadogan along with Defendant Cadogan; having a court meant that hangings had to be done legal. But another day would come. And when it did, by thunder, Buckalew would have to increase his supply of ropes.

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STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF

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5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only.)

LOUIS H. SILBERKLEIT
(Signature of publisher)

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 14th day of October, 1955.
(My commission expires March 30, 1956.)

MAURICE COYNE
Notary Public State of New York
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Cert. Filed in New York County
Commission Expires March 30, 1956

Special Feature

ONE OF THE MIGHTY

by LEE THOMAS

GOLD DUST poured out of the Black Hills. Stages were hijacked by masked bandits. The great Wild Bill was in his grave, and there was only one man alive who could stop these holdups. So they sent for Clark Stocking.

"You are Mr. Clark Stocking?"

"I am, sir. What can I do for you?"

"We are being robbed night or day. They have killed shotgun guards and drivers. We sent for you to stop this, sir."

"You flatter me, superintendent."

The super looked at the man who stood in front of him. By this time Clark Stocking was in his late thirties —tall and wiry and quietly efficient. For over twenty years, he had ridden shotgun guard on gold stages.

"The pay is one hundred and found per month. Interested, Mr. Stocking?"

"When does the next gold leave Deadwood for Laramie?"

"Within an hour."

"I'll be ridin' shotgun on that stage," Clark Stocking said.

Word went through Deadwood that Clark Stocking, the great stagedriver and shotgun-guard, was working for the local stage line. That night Stocking met a friend, Boone May, and he offered him a job. He and May had ridden stage-guard before in California, when the gold-rush and its lawlessness had reached its climax.

For some time, stages went through unbothered. With Clark Stocking handling the reins, with Boone May riding shotgun-guard, bandits thought twice before molesting the Deadwood-Laramie stage. Then, one day, a big shipment of gold went south, and somehow word got out about its transfer.

Boone May loaded a ten-gauge shotgun shell into his shotgun. "There might be trouble, Clark." He was a big man, as old as Stocking, and the trails had made him tough and resilient—a fearless man whose appetites, sometime, were not too clean. But, nonetheless, he was a pioneer, and he moved through a circle of deadly, sometimes greedy, men and women.

"We ride shotgun, both of us. Gene will handle the ribbons."

Boone May loaded a ten-gauge shot- of his scattergun. "Good idea, Clark. If they do hit us they'll be along the brush on Lance Crick, I'd guess. Logical place to stage a stickup."

Clark Stocking smiled thinly. "How would you know, Boone?"

Boone May made his eyes show surprise. "Clark, you scare me. Heck, I never held up a stage in my life—only thing I know about a holdup is that my suspenders hold up my pants."

"Here she comes, Boone."

The stage, scattering dust, came around a bend, and the two shotgun-guards caught it, swinging up on the box beside Gene, the driver. The strongbox was in the boot, and they had a few passengers.

Stocking said, "Nice day."

Boone May said, "Not a cloud in sight."

Gene, the driver, said, "You two would joke with the devil's pitchfork pushin' against you."

"The devil," Clark Stocking murmured. "Wonder if there is such a fellow? If there is one, he must be busy—I've got a lot of friends who are dead."

THE STAGE rocked, the thoroughbraces squeaked, the wheels hit rocks. Boone May, head down, let his body go limp, and he moved with the stage—apparently he slept. Clark Stocking was silent, mulling over his thoughts. This was an old story to him. His life had consisted of stage-line work. He had "tooled" the ribbons in the California fields when only a "button" of twenty-odd, he had driven the South Pass Road in Wyoming Territory, he had seen the Virginia City goldrush in what was later to be Montana Territory.

"Lance Crick ahead, Boone."

Boone May lifted his head and yawned. "Goodby, Gene," he said, and he went over the side to land spraddle-legged beside the road. And behind him came Clark Stocking, a cat in boots. Stocking left the stage of the run, landed on his boots, and then watched the stage disappear into the canyon.

"Hope they got broncs staked out for us," Stocking said, and he went into the buckbrush, with Boone May following. The stagecoach company had two saddled horses tied to a cottonwood. An attendant dozed in the shade, flat on his back, hat over his face.

Stocking said, "Wake up, boy."

The boy said, "There are your horses. Good luck, men."

Both men found stirrups, swung up. Then, with Clark Stocking taking the lead, they followed the stage, riding the higher country. They had had a tip that the stage would be stopped.

Boone May said, quietly, "A dog's life. All this for a hundred bucks a month and found."

"Good wages."

They rode for a few miles, keeping hidden by sandstones and buckbrush and chokecherry trees. Then, in the canyon below them, they saw seven men stop the stage. From their high vantage point the scene was clear with naked clarity.

They hid their horses and went down the slope and came in behind the bandits. Gene sat on the seat, hands held high.

Clark Stocking snapped his words. "Whip up them hosses, Gene. Get to hell out of here, and get out fast!"

The bandits turned, stared at the brush. But Gene, frozen with fear, made no move to use his whip.

Clark Stocking's voice was savage. "Get them hosses out of here, Gene!"

Without another word, he fired over Gene's head. The terrified horses lunged ahead. Bullets whistled around the plunging stage.

"Go to work, Boone," Stocking hollered.

"With pleasure, Clark."

Guns roared and talked. It was seven against two, but the two won. This was the time for gun talk, for savage and roaring shotguns. When it was over—when the powdersmoke cleared—four of the bandits lay in the dust, dead.

The other three threw their hands high. "Don't kill us, men. Take us to jail, but put them shotguns down, please!"

"Jes' two of you?" one marveled, fear in his voice.

"The shotguns did it," said Clark Stocking angrily. "One shotgun beats a dozen .45s at close range. Did you stop a slug, Boone?"

"Nary a scratch. What's wrong with you?"

"Not a damned thing. But I'm mad at Gene for not jumpin' to my orders right off the bat. When I get to town, I'll work him over—with my tongue, though, not my scattergun."

"Give him the works," Boone May said.

★

Straight Arrow and Little Coyote had equal claims to the chieftainship, now that Red Fox was ready to pass it on. And the old chief was troubled as to which of the young men he should choose to lead the tribe into the ways of peace with the conquering white men.

THE LAST OF THE BULLS

by Bernard Schutte

CHIEF RED FOX stood on the top of a mountain, one of the rocky, low mountains that surrounded his tribe's reservation. He looked at the sky; how deep blue it was. He looked at the clouds; how snowy white they were. And he looked at the tall, stately trees on the slopes below, the snow capped mountains in the distance, and, to the south, the sea of waist-high green grass. He often came to this particular mountain top because he could see all these things, and he could reflect back on the years when the Indians were rulers of all these lands.

His had been a mighty tribe. Fierce, fiery fighters, cunning woodsmen and expert horsemen. They were the mightest of the mighty, and he was their last great fighting chief. The next chief would rule only a peaceful tribe of people who had been forced to turn their hands to more productive things to keep body and soul together. They made wood carvings, wove blankets and pounded out metal objects to be sold at the trading post. There was some trapping, but very little; game was getting more scarce each year. His people now had to till the soil and depend on the United States Government beef issue at the fort for food.

This was indeed a blow to the pride of his people but they had no choice. In the last great battles, it was his tribe that held out to the last and it was his tribe who gave the white man his bloodest battles. But, like all the rest, his tribe finally conceded to superior numbers, weapons and brute force.

What great battles they were; what great chiefs they all were. Their knowledge of the territory was always in their favor, and for years the Indians picked their won battleground. They fought bravely, but the white man came on. Despite defeat after defeat the blue-coated soldiers came on until finally they started winning; and when they started winning, that was the end for the Indians. Even in the last bitter battles, the wise chiefs knew they were defeated. But still they fought, as if each battle were the first. They fought until their ranks could no longer be filled with new warriors. Year after year, as the warriors fell, their tepees were left empty of new braves to grow up and fight. All the tribes grew short of ablebodied men to protect the women and children and bring in food. What else was there to do, what could they do, but bend to the will of the white man?

"You spoil the Maiden with white man's ways, my brother."

Now it was all over. Twenty winters and twenty summers had come and gone since the last great battle. He could still remember well the day he and his chiefs paraded in all their regal splendor to the fort to surrender, never to take arms against the white man again. And, because he was a noble chief, he had been given the choicest land to settle on.

He chose a rich valley west of the fort with grass for horses, streams to fish and trap and mountains to hunt in. No longer did the older braves take the younger men out to teach them the art of fighting, the cunning tactics of war. They taught them to plow a straight farrow, bait a hook, and to hunt only for food. But they taught with pride; nothing could daunt the pride of a once-proud people, and he was their chief.

Red Fox stepped down from his rock and strolled to his pony. He mounted with the dexterity of a man many years his junior. He still had a well disciplined body for all his years, and he could still ride and shoot with the best of his tribe.

As he rode down the trail, his eyes scanned the silver stream winding its way through his valley. He noticed his son, Straight Arrow, and the lovely maiden, Corn Flower, sitting on the

bank, their moccasins off and their feet kicking up the white foam in the stream. Straight Arrow was a son to be proud of; he could do all things well. And he had picked the fairest maiden in the tribe to become his wife. She was the daughter of one of his most trusted chiefs. Her father had fought with Red Fox through all the wars and had many wounds to show for his bravery. He was indeed happy to welcome her to his tepee.

Further down the trail he noticed dust rising from the path along the stream. After a while he could tell it was his other son Little Coyote. Seeing both of his sons within minutes of each other set his mind to reflecting and worrying. Reflecting on the day they both came to him, and worrying because only one of them could take command of the tribe.

But which one? Which one deserved this honor? Although Straight Arrow and Little Coyote were both his sons, only one was by his blood. Red Fox could remember well the day his sons came to him.

IT WAS ON the day of the last great battle. Red Fox and his warriors were far outnumbered. Despite the fact that he had again picked his own battleground, this had only delayed the long-dreaded day when his tribe, too, would have to surrender.

The battle was fought in the bend of a great river. His warriors could attack from two sides; when dawn came, Red Fox made several thrusts at the wagons and horses. Each successive attack was beaten off with heavy losses on both sides. Then he ordered a direct attack into the ranks of the soldiers. It was an attack of spirited fighting men on horseback, using inferior weapons against well-trained, disciplined soldiers, well intrenched in the soft river bank. The soldiers would rise from their trenches, fire their repeating rifles, and then drop back into the trenches to reload. This trick, learned at the end of the Great War in the east, was a maneuver that his men could not beat. When Red Fox realized this, he sent a messenger to the camp, informing the older men to pack up and flee with the women and children. The soldiers, sensing that Red Fox might be calling for reinforcements, sent a detachment out after the messenger either to overtake him or to feint-off any reinforcements that might come to Red Fox's aid.

When the tribe was told the news, they hurriedly packed a few belongings and headed north. Two squaws, heavy with child, were laid on travois built for such an emergency. One of the squaws was Red Fox's wife; the other belonged to a warrior probably already fallen in battle.

Hour after hour they pushed on, across plains and over hills and always the tiny speck of dust, the soldiers, trailing them. Then the march began to take its toll. Old people dropped by the side of the road waiting for whatever fate was theirs; children, exhausted, were placed on ponies also exhausted. The women heavy with child began to scream with pains brought on before their time was near. And since one of the women belonged to the chief, a halt was called. Immediately the tribe mid-wives took over, because it was evident both were about to deliver. Both squaws gave birth to boy babies only minutes apart; however, the hurried flight had caused much damage to the squaws and they both died while delivering.

Death called for hurried burials. While the tribe gathered around to sing the burial rites a young maiden was left in charge of the new babies. During the ceremony, an old warrior looked up and noticed the dust on the horizon being made by on soldiers. Quickly the ceremony was cut short, the babies hastily gathered up by oth-

er squaws, and the tribe took flight again.

Finally, when Red Fox gave up in defeat, the rest of the tribe captured and returned, the squaws who had gathered up the new-born babies brought their charges to him, both thinking they had the chief's child. There was a heated argument between the squaws but it presented an unsolvable problem. There was no possible way to prove which baby belonged to the chief; Red Fox was left with only one choice and he took it. He ordered each squaw to raise the baby they held until such time the boys were old enough to enter the chief's tepee. When the proper time came, he would decide which one would become the new chief.

This would offer a great decision to be made. No longer would the young braves be able to prove themselves, nor would there be a Council of Chiefs to make the decision. With peace established, Red Fox was designated by the General at the fort to rule his people only in peaceful pursuits. The General was not concerned in with a succession of rulers.

And now, the time was drawing near. The choice would be hard to make. Both sons had proven themselves in their own right; both were wise men and good leaders. Straight Arrow, who could do all things well, accepted the state of his people and he would lead them in such a manner that they would always survive and find happiness on their reservation. Little Coyote was cunning, a good woodsman, but fierce. He was a fighter—a fighter when his people no longer needed a fighter for their chief. When Red Fox thought of each man's abilities, each could easily be his blood son; each had qualifications necessary for a chief. One, qualifications to lead his people now; the other, qualifications to lead his people in time of war. The decision would be hard to make.

RED FOX slid off his pony in front of his tepee. A young tribesman came forward and lead his pony to the corral. Red Fox went into his tepee; he had to have a council with his thoughts.

The water was warming up in the stream. Soon the brown bodies of young boys would be diving off the rocks for pebbles, and the old men would lie on the sunny banks with fishing poles, not really caring if they caught any fish, just basking in the warm sun. Despite the acceptance of many of the white man's ways, the women of the tribe still did most of the work, even to the skinning and dressing of the government beef.

Straight Arrow was making a necklace of clover blossoms. He finished it and put it around the neck of Corn Flower. Love had entered into the life of Straight Arrow and Corn Flower. A love that had started flickering in both their hearts while they were very young. Since early childhood Straight Arrow had been her protector, her playmate and, of all the maidens in the tribe, he had shown an interest only in her. The same feeling was transmitted by Corn Flower. They had spent many happy hours together; sitting on the banks of the stream, riding together, and walking the many trails that wind around the reservation.

They arose. Straight Arrow helped her with her mocassins and then slipped on his own. Despite the traditions of the tribe, Straight Arrow showed Corn Flower many of the kindnesses of the white man he had picked up on various trips to the trading post. They walked up the path leading to his father's tepee, and arrived at the same time Little Coyote and his followers rode up.

"You show the maiden, Corn Flower, many of the ways of the white man, my brother," said Little Coyote, "it will do no good to spoil her."

"I shall show her all the kindness

I wish, Little Coyote," answered Straight Arrow; "I shall show even more when she becomes my wife."

"Corn Flower is a princess, the only blood princess left in our tribe; therefore, she will be the wife of the next chief. You have not been made the new chief yet, my brother," said Little Coyote.

"When will you remember that we no longer need follow the lines of our forefathers? That now we can live as individuals, and think and act and choose as we please," replied Straight Arrow.

"I am the son of a chief. I shall think and live and act as the son of a chief should," announced Little Coyote; "if you do not choose to do so, then give up your rights as a chief's son. I will then lead our people as they should be led."

"And if I do, then I suppose I should also give up my rights to Corn Flower."

"Yes, that is how it should be," said Little Coyote.

"And what do you propose to do if you become chief? Lead raids on the white settlers and on other reservations, steal horses, or maybe even rise up against the white man altogether?" asked Straight Arrow.

"Perhaps," said Little Coyote; "ours is a proud nation—or have you forgotten?"

"I know that only too well; ours is a proud nation and I shall always keep it so. I would never want to see any of our people hang their heads in shame," said Straight Arrow.

"Then you will reject your claim to be chief?"

"No," snapped Straight Arrow.

"And you still intend to take Corn Flower for your wife, regardless of our father's decision?" cried Little Coyote.

"Yes," stated Straight Arrow.

"We shall see," replied Little Coyote, angrily.

"Yes, we shall see," agreed Straight Arrow. With that Little Coyote kicked his pony and dashed off towards the hills, his three followers chasing after him.

"I DO NOT trust Little Coyote," spoke up Corn Flower, "I worry for your safety."

"Do not worry about me," answered Straight Arrow. "Little Coyote would never harm me deliberately, or behind my back. That would endanger his chances and he does crave to be chief, with a passion I do not share. Lead my people, yes; I will lead them if I am chosen, but lead them to useful and peaceful lives. It will never do well to stir up hatreds or to rob and pilfer other peoples." Straight Arrow began talking with an earnestness and feeling that he had never portrayed to anyone before.

"We must gradually accept more of the white man's ways, treat our women better, teach our children to read and write the white man's tongue, and become more self-supporting. The white man will not feed us forever; we must learn to feed ourselves if we are to survive."

"I feel as you do Straight Arrow, and you must become our chief. Not only for our people's sake, but for me; for I would never consent to a marriage I do not want. I could never become Little Coyote's wife." Corn Flower spoke with tears brimming her eyelids.

"Fear not my lovely one," he answered. "Chief or not, you will be my wife. That I will fight for, and die for."

"I will die too, if I do not become your wife. I shall never be another's."

"Do not worry, little one. Go to your father's tepee; I shall call for you another time."

Straight Arrow would not fight to become chief, but he would fight for Corn Flower. Little Coyote would fight to become chief, and if he did he would

insist on making her his squaw. Trouble was indeed ahead.

Corn Flower discussed this matter with her father. But being a chief of the old guard he would naturally follow the traditions of the tribe; his heart would be happier seeing his daughter the squaw of a chief rather than the squaw of a lesser member of the tribe.

Straight Arrow entered his father's tepee. Red Fox was seated before a small fire deep in thought.

Straight Arrow spoke. "My father, before many moons come and go you must decide which of your sons will succeed you. Your hair turns more like the snow and your blood runs slower in your noble body. Our people must know who will be their new chief. Already some of the older men are wondering and asking questions."

"This I know, my son and the answer is hard to find. I am constantly searching for the answer. My wisdom does not tell me. I have a great love for both of my sons; yet I know the consequences to follow when I choose. You are a wise man, and would make a great leader. But Little Coyote will never concede to you; he will resort to any means to gain the leadership. Little Coyote is a fine warrior, but our people do not need a great warrior to lead them any longer."

Red Fox dropped his head and gazed into the fire. "This is indeed a grave decision to make. See to my ponies, my son, while I think out this problem."

WHEN LITTLE COYOTE and his companions rode out of the camp they headed for their favorite meeting place—a spring, hidden in the trees, high up on a mountain side. They gathered around a fire while one of the members roasted a rabbit, freshly killed.

Another, Crooked Nose by name, spoke. "Our guns need bullets but it is still weeks before we will be issued our rations by the soldiers at the fort. How will we hunt and raid the other reservations if we have no bullets?"

"I know," answered Little Coyote; "we must trade some coyote pelts for bullets at the trading post."

"But they will not trade us bullets for pelts; it is against their rules."

"Well, we shall try. I would like to see more closely where the bullets are kept in the trading post. When we get there, we shall ask for bullets; if we are refused, then we shall ask for things that will take the agent away from his shelves. Let me talk first." With that they hastily ate the rabbit, gathered up the pelts, mounted their ponies and galloped off towards the fort. When they arrived, it was dark, so they made camp and slept till dawn. In the morning when the fort gates were opened they mounted their ponies and rode into the fort and stopped in front of the trading post.

They walked inside and threw their pelts on the counter. It was dark inside the trading post; many and varied smells were in the air, but the stench of human bodies prevailed.

The manager of the post walked up. He looked over the pelts and spoke to Little Coyote. "Nice batch of pelts you got there Little Coyote, very nice. What will you take for them?"

"We are in need of bullets for our guns. Our aim gets worse with the scarcity of game and it takes more bullets to kill. We would like some bullets for these pelts."

"You know I'm not allowed to give out bullets to you," answered the manager. "If the General ever heard about me giving out bullets to you, I'd be run out of the fort. I'll give you anything else except bullets."

"Bullets is all we are interested in," snapped Little Coyote, trying to bluff the manager unsuccessfully.

"I'm sorry but I can't do it," the manager said.

"Then we shall look around," replied Little Coyote, calmly.

"Please do," the manager answered.

Little Coyote turned to Crooked Nose, looked him in the eyes, then he let his own eyes travel to the back of the store. Crooked Nose, catching on, strolled towards the rear of the store and began to examine a display of axes and knives. The manager came from behind the counter and began to shop-talk Crooked Nose into selecting a new axe. While his back was turned, Little Coyote quietly slipped behind the counter and began to examine the barrels of bullets, looking for the kind that fitted their guns. When he found the right barrel, he checked one of the bullets with those in the boxes next to it.

Confident he was right, he slipped from behind the counter and spoke. "I see nothing I wish; we shall go." With that he gathered up the pelts and stalked out the trading post, his companions hurrying behind him.

LITTLE COYOTE rode out of the fort, when he and his followers reached the fort gates they all gave a loud war cry and fled. The cry was a standard procedure with Little Coyote, and he always yelled thus when he left the fort. It was a sort of defiance he held for the white man, still carried over the years. However, the soldiers at the fort were used to it; they only laughed, or ignored it all together.

Little Coyote lead his party to a distant knoll. He rode until he found a stream of water and some trees to hide in. Then he dismounted and beckoned his companions to do likewise. After they tied up their ponies they gathered around in a circle to hold a council.

Little Coyote spoke. "I have a plan to get more bullets for our guns."

"Speak," urged Crooked Nose.

"I have studied the ways of the soldiers at the fort, especially at night. I have a plan to slip into the fort at night and steal the bullets we need." Little Coyote looked at each man as he spoke.

When the others heard this they all raised objections and mumbled disagreement with the plan. This would mean prison if they were caught, and they would rather die than go to prison.

Crooked Nose rose. "Little Coyote is a great leader; someday he will lead our people. But today he speaks foolishly. I think it best we forget the bullets and go back to the reservation." Crooked Nose's words brought agreement from the others.

"Listen," cried out Little Coyote, "listen to my plan." He stood up and eyed each man, instilling confidence in each of them with his eyes. Slowly each man sat down and Little Coyote began to outline his plan.

He mapped out his plan with a stick in the dirt. This plan must be executed with caution, because not only would they be imprisoned for stealing but also for being caught in the fort after dark. Even now, the soldiers kept watch, a holdover from the fighting days when, between peace councils, peaceful tribes visited the fort.

After much arguing and bickering among themselves, Little Coyote finally won each of them over to his side. He thoroughly outlined each man's duty when they entered the fort.

When the plan was finally agreed upon, and each man knew what he was supposed to do, they ate corn meal mixed with water and baked on hot rocks. Then they settled down to wait for darkness, making small talk and praising their own cunningness.

As darkness descended, Little Coyote began to get restless. He looked at his friends. He had grown up with them, played with them, hunted and

fished with them. As they grew older, he lead them on raids and they had all proven themselves. But now, even though he had always had the deepest faith and trust in them his faith in them began to falter. If this plan failed or were revealed, he could never enter his father's tepee again. Above all the traits of good leadership his father admired, honesty and integrity were the highest. These traits set the example for his people and his father adhered to them religiously. He expected his sons to do the same. When Red Fox took the oath never to fight again, he instilled that oath in his people and his sons. To break that oath meant forfeiture of Little Coyote's hope to be chief.

Little Coyote thought of these things, but his desire to show these few his ability overwhelmed him, and he could not resist the temptation. Besides, it was too late to back out now. He could only hope that everything came off all right and wait—wait for darkness to come and move out.

AT LAST it was time to go. They mounted and rode out of the woods. The fort would be sleeping now. The night guard would be on duty.

They walked their ponies to the fort.

With the peaceful days stretching into years, brush had been allowed to grow up on the sloping side of the fort. Saplings also were scattered here and there, making fine cover for man and horse. It was towards this side of the fort that Little Coyote walked his pony.

When they were about fifty feet from the fort they tied their ponies and waited for the moon to slip behind a cloud. Then, one by one they slipped up to the wall, found toeholds and scaled the walls. Once over the wall they rolled over the scaffolding and hid under it.

Inside, they bunched together and waited and listened. Then, in single file they worked their way towards the trading post, always taking advantage of the shadows of buildings and waiting for the moon to slip in and out of behind the clouds.

When they reached the trading post, each took his station. Little Coyote covered the lock in a piece of blanket and with one blow from his axe he broke the lock. They slipped inside and each man took his position, as agreed to at the stream. One by the door, looking out through a crack. One at the front door in case someone came calling after hours. One behind the door to the manager's sleeping quarters; in case he awakened and came out, then he could be grabbed from behind. Little Coyote and Crooked Nose went to the barrel where the bullets were.

When he reached the spot he was looking for he motioned for Crooked Nose to open the skin pouch he had over his shoulder. All was going well until Crooked Nose accidentally knocked over a box of shells with his elbow.

When the box hit the floor each man froze in his tracks. The box burst open and bullets rolled across the floor. They waited to see if the manager awakened.

The manager did awaken, but instead of jumping out of bed and running into the room he slid out of bed quietly and reached for his revolver. Then, in bare feet he crept over to the door and lifted the latch, not knowing a warrior stood behind the door. As he stepped through the door the brave hit him over the head with the side of his axe. However, instead of falling to the floor unconscious, the blow caused him to pull the trigger of his revolver. The shot immediately awakened the fort and soldiers would be running out of bunkhouses in a matter of seconds. The guard was alerted and several

started running towards the trading post.

Little Coyote and his men rushed out of the trading post by the rear exit and took refuge in the shadows. They raced along the buildings until they reached the spot they had scaled the wall of the fort. When they reached the spot he stopped them and directed them to go over the wall one at a time. Their chance for escape still lay in not being seen at all, rather than making a mad dash for freedom. And too, Little Coyote still had in the back of his mind his desire of being chief; at any cost he would protect those chances.

To get over the wall, first each man had to shimmy up a pole supporting the scaffolding and then leap over the fort wall to freedom. Quickly Little Coyote took in the position of the guards. He waved his hand. One, up and over; two up and over; three up and over. Wait, a soldier came running down the scaffolding. Freeze. The soldier was just overhead, the remaining braves held their breath. The soldier scanned the terrain, peering into the brush, then turned and hurried back up the scaffolding. Little Coyote signaled. Crooked Nose started up the pole. He was on the scaffolding and ready to leap when the soldier turned and saw him. Quickly he lifted his rifle and fired catching Crooked Nose in mid-air as he leaped. Crooked Nose let out a death scream, twisting his body as he fell. His limp body hit the ground, rolled over and lay lifeless in the dirt.

THE SOLDIER hurried down the ladder heading towards the spot that Crooked Nose came from. He yelled as he ran. Little Coyote was trapped. The shot signaled other soldiers; in seconds they would show up. He shimmied up the pole and rolled over on the scaffolding, drawing his axe at the same time. He raised up on one knee and aimed at the soldier, other soldiers rushing across the grounds shooting as they ran.

The soldier yelled, "It's Little Coyote, the chief's son." As his words rang out they were immediately followed by a scream of agony as Little Coyote's axe found its mark, and he leaped over the fort wall.

His remaining companions were waiting by the ponies. They leaped on and raced through the brush. The wall of the fort was lined with soldiers, and each one had his rifle trained on the brush. As the braves reached the open ground, the soldiers opened fire, a hail of bullets hitting both ponies and men.

Little Coyote was in the rear; when he saw what happened, he pulled hard on his pony's rein and raced for what cover there was beyond the brush. There were wagons and tepees dotting the landscape and he headed for them. He guided his pony zig-zag fashion between them always trying to keep some sort of obstacle between him and the guns until he was out of range.

As he raced along, his pony screamed as a bullet found its mark in a fleshy part of its body, but Little Coyote kicked him on. He thought he was almost clear when a hot, searing pain hit him in the thigh. The pain tore through his whole body, but the will to be free drove him on. Finally he was out of range and he slackened his pace as he became lost in the vast blackness of the night. He was free, but not for long.

Little Coyote knew what this meant. In the morning soldiers would come to his father's tepee, looking for him. They would take him back to prison, possibly death if his axe ended the life of the soldier he threw it at. He knew he could not go to his father's lodge, so he headed for the spring. There he could tend his wound and make his plans. His visions of becoming chief were shattered. For a moment he cursed Crooked Nose for his clumsiness. Now he must think of escape;

escape and survival. Where to go, and how to live? His first thoughts were to hole up in the mountains, but he could not survive without weapons, clothing and food. Regardless, he knew he would never surrender alive.

In the morning, a company of soldiers set out on horseback, headed for the reservation of Chief Red Fox. They arrived just before noon. The officer-in-charge called a halt at the edge of the camp and with a few men moved on the tepee of Red Fox. The clamor and excitement of the youngsters reached Red Fox and Straight Arrow, and they stepped out of the tepee and waited for the officer. Red Fox knew something was amiss.

When the officer told Red Fox and Straight Arrow the story, they were both shocked and hurt. The trust he, Red Fox, had given on the day of surrender had been broken, and by his own son. He had no choice but to offer his help in the capture of Little Coyote. He called for his pony and soon he, Straight Arrow, and a few of his men were riding with the soldiers towards the mountains to start the long search for Little Coyote.

THEY RODE the trail all day with no success. That night they made camp and ate a scanty meal. Red Fox tried to rest, but sleep would not come and he welcomed the dawn.

They rode the trails all day again, stopping only to rest the horses and eat a quick meal at noon. Red Fox's heart was heavy. He did not talk, only searched every wooded glen and rocky path for his son, or for some sign of him.

And then, as the sun began to descend in the west they saw him. He was standing at the top of a rocky peak, the red ball of the sun making a halo around him. He had seen them miles away, and, seeing the futility of flight, waited for them, ready to fight to the death.

At the spring hideout, Little Coyote had found another axe; also there were war paints, and he had smeared his face in a guardy, hideous fashion. He was prepared for death. He waited for the long line to reach the top of the mountain.

Red Fox, Straight Arrow and the soldiers stopped and dismounted. The horses could go no further and the rest of the journey had to be made on foot. The officer dispersed his men to cut off all avenues of escape. Then he called to Little Coyote to come down and surrender.

Red Fox heard his answer—defiant, challenging and unafraid. He watched him. He stood there proud, menacing and waiting, watching their every move. Like a mighty bull buffalo that used to roam the plains, he stood there —surveying his domain, looking for trouble, ready to signal a warning at the first approach of hunters. The bulls were gone now, never to roam again. Soon, Little Coyote would be gone, too—gone to the white man's prison and to his punishment. Red Fox could not help but feel proud of him as he stood waiting, knowing his fate but not showing any signs of weakening. He was a brave bull, too—the last of the brave bulls.

Straight Arrow turned to his father and the officer. "Wait here," he told them, "I shall go up the mountain and bring him down."

"No, my son," replied Red Fox, "he is armed and he will kill you."

"That is a chance I must take." Straight Arrow answered, "for if I am to someday lead my people I must show that I stand for justice and am not afraid of death."

Red Fox knew this and gave him these words to guide him. "Go, my son; do the duty that is yours, and may the Great Spirit be on your side."

Straight Arrow started up the mountain. When he was halfway up he called to Little Coyote to come down and

surrender. Little Coyote yelled back at him to go back down the mountain or be killed.

Straight Arrow reached the top of the mountain and faced Little Coyote. His brother stood there, every muscle taut, ready to strike. The red gold of the sun was like a halo around his whole body. His blood stained and tattered leggings sagged at his waist. The war paint made him a fierce looking fighter. Straight Arrow knew Little Coyote was a fighter, probably a better fighter than he was, because he had not practiced the art; he was a peace loving man.

He called to Little Coyote. "Come, you must go down and give yourself up; you have killed a soldier and therefore, you must pay the penalty as described by the white man."

"I shall never be taken alive. I have killed and I shall kill again if necessary. Go back, or my axe will end your life as it did the soldier back at the fort."

"No," retorted Straight Arrow, "I have come to take you back and that I will do."

"If you take one step closer I shall end your life with this axe," Little Coyote yelled, his voice showing the strain of the last few days.

STRAIGHT ARROW knew this but he must go on, he could not back up now. He watched Little Coyote. Both men eyed each other, each waiting for the other to make the first move. Suddenly Straight Arrow jumped off the rock he was standing on to gain better footing. Immediately Little Coyote threw his axe, Straight Arrow swerved but the axe grazed his arm, bringing a gush of blood.

They drew their knives and maneuvered for position. Each man was poised, ready to strike. This was a fight to the death; brother against brother, principle against principle. Both men were wounded and weak from loss of blood.

Straight Arrow stepped on a rock; it slipped and he went down on one knee. Instantly Little Coyote sprang forward, knife held high ready to deliver the death-stroke. Straight Arrow grabbed his wrist and struck with his own knife. He met only air, and Little Coyote in turn grabbed his wrist. Little Coyote's momentum pushed Straight Arrow over on his back and they began to roll, each man trying to loosen his knife-hand and gain footing. Neither could do so, only hold the other at bay. Suddenly, Little Coyote summoned up all his available strength and dashed Straight Arrow's knife-hand against a sharp rock, causing him to drop his knife. He then grabbed Straight Arrow by the throat; Straight Arrow grabbed his arm, trying to pull his hand away before he cut off his breath. Over and over they rolled, breaking holds and getting new ones.

Their struggle carried them to the edge of a cliff. If they fell or rolled off, both would be killed. Little Coyote rolled over on top of Straight Arrow, trying with one hand to end it with a thrust of his knife, trying with the other hand to push Straight Arrow off the cliff.

Straight Arrow tried a do-or-die trick; he put his foot in Little Coyote's midriff and flipped him over his head. Little Coyote was taken by surprise and when he landed he was on the very edge of the cliff. There was no footing or hand-holds; he was slipping, slipping over the cliff to certain death. Straight Arrow rolled over and looked up. He lunged forward trying to grab Little Coyote but he missed. He looked at Little Coyote's face. It was mixed with fear, horror and perplexity; the blood drained out of it. Each streak of war paint stood out from the mask of blood, dirt and sweat.

Little Coyote knew his fate but with every ounce of strength he fought for his life. However, his was a lost cause; he slipped off the ledge, falling to the rocks below. As his body hurled through the air he gave out a scream of death; yet, as it echoed through the mountains one could almost detect a ring of defiance. The same defiance Little Coyote lived by and finally died by.

Straight Arrow dropped his head, a sick flush rushed through his body. He had won the battle, but not the way he wanted to win. He had not wanted to win. He had not wanted to be the cause of his brother's death. Now it was all over and he could not help it.

Red Fox, his chiefs and the soldiers watched the battle. They watched it see-saw back and forth. They watched Straight Arrow flip Little Coyote through the air and they saw him dig into the rock, trying to save himself. They saw his body fall through the air. When Red Fox saw the end he dropped his head too. The echo of his son's scream hit his ears like a thousand screams, filling his head like a thousand voices.

The officer sent a detachment of soldiers to recover the body and then they all returned to the reservation.

When they arrived, Little Coyote's body was taken to his father's tepee. Red Fox followed them into the tepee and then ordered everyone out.

Corn Flower was waiting for Straight Arrow. When he walked up to her, neither said a word. They just held each other, thankful it was all over and thankful they were back together. She looked up into his face. She wiped away the dirt and sweat and smoothed his ruffled hair. He kissed her forehead, then lead her away from the crowd.

He headed for the stream and their favorite rock. Arm and arm they walked each to their own thoughts, but each thinking the same thing. Peace had returned to the reservation.

★

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ACTION - PACKED WESTERN

Dick Clay had sworn never to use his guns again. But . . . he was free to wear them, for all the good that would do!

NO GUNS FOR JUSTICE

by CARL MINCEMOYER

MR. SIMMONS said hotly, "In the East, this sort of thing would never be allowed. Does Carson think he's the Almighty, or something?"

Dick Clay leaned on the plank counter of his small hardware store and listened. He looked out the big front window recently shipped in from Dodge City. The dusty street was quiet now at midday, strangely quiet after the wildness of last night.

"It's outrageous," Mr. Simmons went on. "With Carson's sheriff always drunk, it isn't safe to walk the street after supper. And with Carson, it isn't safe anywhere any time."

"Speak of the devil," Dick said, watching the entrance to Carson's saloon across the street.

Mr. Simmons glanced out quickly. "Oh, Lord...what's he want now?" He held his voice low.

They waited in silence while Carson lumbered up on the porch, followed by the lighter step of a dark, slim man known only as Pete. Carson kicked the screen door open and stepped in, with Pete flanking him. The spring pulled the door shut with a slam.

Carson paused a moment, smiling tightly. Then he said, "I'll see you later, Simmons."

Mr. Simmons stood still. Dick thought he could almost feel this man cringe.

"I said I'd see you later," Carson repeated, his voice huge.

Mr. Simmons muttered a "Yes, sir," and hurried around Carson and through the screen door, stumbling on the door sill. Dick watched him go past the window towards his newly opened drygoods store.

"What's in them cans?" Carson demanded, nodding toward the back shelf.

"Paint," Dick said.

"Is that a fact?" Carson drew his gun, aimed and shot three times, the sound of the shots booming against the low ceiling. Three of the cans sprung a leak, the paint rushing down into the nail bins like a messy rainbow.

"Well, you was right at that," Carson said. His smile stretched across his face.

Dick's foot rested on the partly-open drawer below the cash register. In the drawer two gunbelts twisted like coiled snakes, the holsters holding bone-handled death. His mind went to the guns now, but his body remained rigid.

CARSON BLEW at the tiny wisp of powdersmoke from the barrel and holstered his gun. He shook his head with mock regret. "I shouldn't oughta do things like that; it ain't no way to get friendly, is it?"

"I used my guns for law, but..."

"Nope," Dick said. There was a lot else on his mind to say, but Carson had his hand on his gun; behind him Pete was hovering, and there were seven more paint cans on the back shelf.

"What I'm trying to say is I want to be friendly. My town needs merchants. I think a fella who played it smart could do right well."

Dick slowly slid the drawer shut with his foot, putting temptation a little farther away. Carson was waiting for him to speak.

"I'm open to business to all that can pay," Dick replied. "I think I mentioned that before."

Muscles swelled along Carson's jaw. "You ain't keeping your policy. I hear you gave credit to Sol Petersen."

Dick nodded. "He'll pay."

Carson grew a new smile that outdid the others. Dick saw the big man's stomach jerk as he grunted with glee.

"You'll have to check that one up to loss. I guess you ain't heard. He came in from work last night and started a fire in his stove. Seems there was some dynimite in it, though. What do you think of that crazy fool—putting dynimite in his stove?"

Dick looked out the window, away from Carson's eyes. "Seems it happened here before."

"Yeah," Carson said roughly. "All them farmers learn awful slow."

"All right," Dick said. He hoped Carson wasn't going to blow all day.

"Listen, Clay, this is my town. There were Injuns lying around waiting to be buried when I laid it out. Everything here I planned and built myself. I hadda *fight* for it. Ain't no farmers coming in after all the fighting is done and taking my land and my town, law or no law. I'm still fighting. And ain't nobody gonna make it easier for them. They won't stay if they can't buy nothing."

He paused a moment. "You listen to me. I'm a patient man. I could like you...but you better tow the line pretty damn quick. And no more credit to farmers."

He opened the door and stepped out, Pete following silently behind. They passed Dora Simmons on the porch. Carson touched his hat to her, but she looked away. Carson scowled and started across the street.

Dora came in. The corners of her lips were tucked down. Dick knew she was scared and ashamed of the thing that was happening to her father.

"Well, did he give you the do or die?" she asked sharply. "Father's over there acting like a scared rabbit. And everybody else in town acts the same way. Whoever said that in the West men were men, never was here."

DICK WALKED to the back shelf and tilted the paint cans so no more would run out. He hadn't minded the humiliation before, but now, with her there, he minded it very much. And the worst part was knowing she wouldn't understand.

She came up behind him. "Did Carson do that?"

Dick nodded, looking for a rag.

"And you didn't do anything! Honestly—"

She turned and stalked to the door. "Dora!" Dick called, but she gave no sign of hearing him. Then she was gone, a slight trace of scent pausing in the air.

Dick walked behind the counter and opened the drawer. He looked at the bone-handled .45s. He reached down and felt his hand slide smoothly into the familiar grip.

For a girl like that, a man could almost be persuaded to put them on and try his luck, he thought. He glanced across the street. There were only two of them in there now; Carson and his gunny...

He slammed the drawer in anger. Why did he even bother to think of it. He'd never wear them...

Mr. Simmons was packing his personal belongings into a buckboard when Dick came down the street the next morning, going to work. Dick leaned on the sideboard until Mr. Simmons came out with another lead. "Pulling out, eh?"

Mr. Simmons set a carpet bag and an armload of books on the tail gait. He pulled out a large red handkerchief and ran it across his face although the morning air was cool.

"I'm selling out; it's the only thing I can do. I've given it lots of thought, and it's the only thing. Carson'll make trouble if I sell to the nesters, and I can't make a living selling overalls to cowhands."

Dick nodded. He had just noticed Pete sitting in front of his store. Something slid and turned inside him—something that was neither fear or bravery.

"Dick, if you was smart, you'd do the same thing. Carson's too big to fight, and there's lots of clean towns. It just isn't worth the trouble."

Dick started to walk down the street.

"Wait a minute," Mr. Simmons called. "What are you figuring to do?"

Dick shook his head. "I don't know."

Carson had had it easy with Simmons, Dick thought. Maybe they'd try for him, Dick Clay, today, and get the whole undesirable element out of town at once. The rest of the merchants had thrown in with Carson,

afraid even to speak with Dick and Simmons.

Pete sat with his back against the front of the building, and Dick had to step over his legs to get by. He unlocked the front door and started to go in when Pete said, "Hey, you."

Dick turned and looked down at Pete's thin face. "Yes?"

"I seen you before, ain't I? Weren't you a barkeep in Dodge once?"

"Does Carson want to know. What he should worry about is where I'm going."

A HALF HOUR later, Dick was looking through the window when the farmer came along the row of porches, his homespun shirt and pants coated with soil. Pete still sprawled across the hardware porch. The farmer glanced suspiciously at Pete, and Pete grinned back. The farmer started to step over Pete's legs as Dick had done.

But Pete lifted one leg and the farmer was caught off balance. He fell across the splintery boards. He jumped to his feet, shaking a hand that had picked up a painful sliver; anger ran across his face.

"Why'd you do that?" he wanted to know.

Pete rose to his feet slowly. He smiled. "Why'd I do what?"

"Trip me," the farmer said. He stepped back, not liking this lanky man with the beady eyes.

"What you want to make of it?" Pete said. His hands flew out and grabbed the front of the farmer's grimy shirt. He slammed the farmer against the building, the farmer's elbow crashing against the window. The window patterned with cracks; a few pieces rattled to the floor inside the store.

Dick had already left his post behind the counter, and he stepped quickly out the screen door. His hands fumbled roughly on the slick buckskin of Pete's back, and finally caught the collar. He started to pull Pete off, but Pete had already left go of the farmer.

Dick brought his own hand to his side. He said to the farmer, "Go on."

The farmer looked from one to the other, then walked hastily up the street, looking over his shoulder once as if to be sure he had really escaped.

Pete said, "You're gonna get yourself hurt, little fella, buttin' into folks' affairs."

"He was a customer," Dick said.

Pete chortled. "He was a nester, that's what."

Dick pushed the screen door open, stopped. "If you're gonna stay here all day, I might as well close up. I don't want anyone killed on my account."

Pete eased himself down to his old position on the porch. "Can't rightly say how long either of us will be here. The boss sort of had the idea you might like to see him. He says you can go on over to his place anytime."

"No thanks," Dick said.

He got the broom and dustpan and swept the glass into a pile. He examined the window; it was destroyed, although something stuffed into the broken part ought to hold it until he got a new one freighted in.

He frowned. Would he be here long enough to need a new window?

Then he saw Dora coming along the porch. He set himself. If Pete tripped her...

But Dora stepped down to the street and walked around him. Pete wrinkled his forehead and rubbed his whiskers with his fist, grinning.

SHE CAME in and bent over the counter. "I saw what happened, Dick."

He nodded. He began sweeping the glass into the dustpan. Funny how his tongue got stiff when she was around.

"Dad's leaving," she said.

"I know." Dick watched the glass slide out of the dustpan into the trash barrel.

"Well, I'm not!" she stormed. "That man doesn't frighten me. He's only so tough because no one will stand up to him. I'm going to stand. You're probably going to sell out, too, so you might as well sell to me. I can't pay you everything now, but I will when I get things going."

Dick laid the broom aside and looked at her. Doggoned, if she didn't mean it. "So you think you can fight Carson all by yourself?"

She turned her face from him. "Well, I can try. That's more than anyone else wants to do."

"I better nail something over the window. That glass is liable to fall and hurt somebody."

He picked up an old carton top he had brought from the back room and started to tack it fast to the wall. He was aware Dora had walked behind the counter.

"These will work as good as a hammer," she said.

Dick turned, saw her holding up the holstered guns. "How did you know about these?" he asked softly.

"The drawer was open when I kept shop one night. I happened to see them."

Dick pulled them out of her hand. He squeezed past her, put them in the drawer, then slammed it shut. He would have to get rid of them. He should have done it long ago.

She came beside him. "You're not afraid, Dick. You pulled that gunfighter off the farmer. You're not afraid—what is it."

He looked into her serious face. He put his hands on her shoulders, hardly noticing he was doing what he had ached to do since he had seen her; he simply was trying to make it easier to say what he must.

"Come on back here."

He led her by the hand to the back storeroom where Pete wouldn't hear. They stopped in the shadowy room and faced each other. He opened his mouth, shook his head...it wasn't easy.

"What troubles you so?" she asked quietly.

HE PUT his hands into his pockets and made his arms stiff. "There were a lot of things...the past, I've hid. I didn't want you to ever know. The guns—I don't know why I ever kept them. I told myself it was in case of robbery, but that isn't the truth. Maybe they mean too much to me, maybe I can never let them go."

He paused, then said bluntly, "Dora, I've killed six men."

He watched her face, expecting the tightness, expecting the bleak, fearful stare he had seen so many times in the past when people had learned who he was.

But her face didn't change, except for a slight, serious frown. And in a little while, she said, "Was it fair fighting?"

Dick shrugged. "Fair...? Each man drew first. But they didn't have

any more chance against me than if I had shot them in the back. I can remember the look on their faces—like they still doubted I could draw that fast.

"I left all that on my backtrail—I tried to. One of those men had a family. I tried to help out. I had money. But she wouldn't take nothing off me.

"That's when I took an oath before God I wouldn't use my guns on another man. Well, I kept the oath, but I also kept the guns. I don't know why, excepting I never been much good at much but—using them."

He stopped, amazed at the way the words had rushed, and slightly ashamed as he realized how much he had needed to tell someone.

Dora bit her lip and gazed at the floor. Dick wished she would speak, let him know what she was thinking. Damn it! He should have chosen his words, maybe even written them down first, like making a speech.

"It's funny," he said. "You're the

only one I really wanted to keep all that from, and you're the only one that knows now."

"I'm glad you told me," she said, looking up. "I—I believe you had a good reason to do what you did."

"Is any reason good enough to kill a man?"

"Sometimes it's a good thing to use guns; sometimes there is no choice. A law officer has to use them. If you used them against men like Carson, it'd be a good thing."

Dick shook his head in frustration. "I took an oath. Six lives—do you understand what that is?"

Dora moved toward him, her eyes wide with determination. "I understand. But what about the farmers? What about Sol Petersen? Don't you see—a man has to use whatever he has against men like Carson?"

"I don't know," Dick said. He knew that his face showed his confusion. "I took an oath."

He heard the sound of someone's boots on the porch. He held up his hand for Dora to be silent. Several men were coming into the store.

"Wait here," he whispered.

HE WENT to the doorway, saw Carson and a stranger waiting. Through habit he walked behind the counter, wondering if they had heard.

"Clay, I want you to meet Frank Bastion," Carson said, smiling. "He's the man that's gonna take over this enterprise."

Dick's eyes were fixed on Carson's smile, and Carson's words were only noises without meaning. It seemed that Carson was always smiling, like a man trying to hide from a conscience that screamed dead men's names at night. Or maybe men like Carson didn't hear...

"Clay, you've had enough time. You got until twelve o'clock—that's two hours—to decide if you're selling or not. But we've been over that before. I just ain't got no use for nesters and them as helps them. I'll be over in the saloon when you make up your mind."

Carson walked to the door, looked back. "One thing plumb slipped my mind. The price has gone down; I'll

give you five hundred dollars for the works."

Dick watched Carson and Bastion walk across the street and enter the saloon. His long slender fingers lay balled on the counter. He looked around the store, at the nail bins, the knife counter, the stacks of pans—all his new life was in this business.

Sometimes a man had no choice...

Suddenly, his decision reached, he hurried to the drawer. He pulled it open and lifted out the gunbelts with the twin holsters. The weight felt sharply reassuring in his hand, and all

"I've killed army renegades, and other lawless breeds."

at once he knew why he had kept the guns.

Dick buckled them around his thin waist as he walked to the back room. He wanted to see Dora first. That was important.

Dora stared at the guns. She stood unmoving, one small hand pressed to the neckline of the blue cotton dress.

She's scared, Dick thought. But this was what she wanted.

"Dick—" she started, then was unable to finish.

He waited a little, but he wanted to be on with it. Waiting made him think, and thinking again made his stomach go sour. Everything had to be smooth and fast; thinking brought fear.

"I'm going across," he said at last.

She shook her head. "No, Dick! You don't have to prove anything to me."

"I know. I just gotta—"

"Those things I said, maybe I didn't mean them. Things might work out some other way."

Dick stepped to her and put his arms around her shoulders. When he touched her he noticed his fingers were feeling strange. This waiting was no good. "What you said was right. I'd of come to the same conclusion, anyhow."

He made himself leave her. He walked to the door. "You stay back here," he said.

"I'll wait for you, Dick."

He stalked half the length of the store and stopped. He moved his fingers, limbering them. They were damp with nervousness. Too much waiting.

"Pete!" he yelled. "Pete!"

HE SAW Pete's shoulder through the window as he rose from the porch. Then Pete squinted through the screen door, but wouldn't be able to see into the shadows. "What you want, Clay? You wanta see Carson?"

"I want to see you," Dick said. "Come on in."

He heard Pete mumble something to himself as he reached for the door handle. He opened it and entered. He stopped suddenly when he saw the guns on Dick's waist. The door slammed like a shot.

Pete's eyes narrowed. "You aiming to try something?"

"I'm ready when you are."

Pete's hands hung at his sides. He rubbed the palm of his right hand slowly on his thigh. He nodded slightly at some secret thought.

"Come on," Dick said. He thought of Dora in the back room. Was she waiting breathlessly for the shot? He'd get it over with quickly for her sake.

"Ain't never been but one man ever carried his left gun butt forward," Pete said. "I knew I saw you before. You're Jesse Plite!"

"Jesse Plite died," Dick said, "until Carson brought him back to life. But he's going to die when this is over, one way or another."

Pete's palm still moved slowly on his thigh. Dick watched it carefully. One split second could kill a man.

"Come on," Dick said; "make your play or get out of town."

Pete's eyes wavered, like a man looking for cover. "I ain't never backed down to a man yet."

"You mean you ain't never stood up to a man. Maybe if I had a stove you could put some dynimite in it."

Pete's hand stopped. He glared at Dick, the silence and stillness stretching the seconds to minutes. Pete was breaking, Dick knew. Except that his pride wouldn't let him do it easily.

Pete said weakly, "I got no fight with Jesse Plite."

"I got a fight with Carson," Dick said. "Are you working for Carson or are you riding?"

Pete made an embarrassed grin and shrugged, keeping the movement deliberately slow. "Well, I guess I'm ridin'."

"Okey. Go to the livery stable and get a horse—"

"My horse is over in front of the saloon."

"Never mind that one. Get one at the stable. And I wanta see you ride out the other way, and make it fast."

Pete hesitated a moment, then turned and went out. Dick walked to the door and watched Pete walk swiftly to the stable. He remained there until he saw Pete ride out of the barn and start down the street, out of town.

HE KNEW that Dora was watching him from the back room. He said, "One down." He walked across the dusty street, the bright sunshine hurting his eyes after the store. He realized some of the old excitement was coming back; the feeling of powerfulness that could never come from physical strength alone. He tried to suppress it. After this his guns were coming off —one way or another.

Dick's sandals were silent as he crossed the porch and pushed through the batwing. He saw he had taken Carson completely by surprise, as he had wished to do. Carson didn't look from his conversation with Bastion until he heard the swish of the batwings. The surprise was plain on his face.

Nobody spoke unnecessary words. Dick looked straight ahead with a juggler's preoccupation so he could command both the bartender and the men at the table at once. Carson was armed, and there would be a shotgun behind the bar.

"You, Bastion, and the bartender—get out," Dick said.

Nobody moved, watching him.

"I said get out," Dick repeated. He moved his hand a little nearer his gun.

The bartender started first, then Bastion rose. Dick tensed; Carson might draw when the stranger came between them. But Carson didn't draw, keeping his hands flat on the table. Dick stepped aside so the men could file past him. "Get plumb up the street, if you want to live," he said.

Dick heard them move up the boardwalk. He and Carson stared at each other. The corner of Carson's lip twitched.

Dick walked slowly to the center of the bar, seeing Carson's head turn slowly to follow him. He stopped when he was sure no unseen gun might plug him from outside.

"Well, Carson, what say we bury the hatchet and get together—my way?"

Carson made a small nervous titter. "No hard feelings? You can't blame me for putting a little pressure on."

"That's right, anybody might have done the same thing." Dick left himself grin.

Carson was half grinning himself. "You wanta be cut in, is that it?"

"No," Dick said, still grinning. "I want to cut you out."

The smirk on Carson's face froze. "I—I don't understand."

"Stand up!" Dick said.

Carson rose slowly. "What are you going to do?"

"I don't rightly know," Dick said. "I mean, I don't rightly know if I'm going to shoot you in the head or the gut. You got any preference?"

CARSON said nothing. His face was cold sober now, as he realized exactly what was going on.

"Maybe you'd like to cuddle up to some dynimite. That seems to be your favorite way of going under."

The twitch in Carson's face started again.

"Come on. You like to show them guns off; let's see what you can do with them."

Carson was edging towards the batwinged door. His voice rose suddenly. "Pete! Pete!" But there was no answer other than the silent hum of death in the room.

"Go on and take a look," Dick said.

Carson almost ran to the entrance, looked toward the hardware store.

"Pete rode that-away. For the duration. He wouldn't of been much help, anyways."

Carson turned back to face Dick. His face looked tired, like that of a man who stays up nights to scheme.

"Unbuckle your gun," Dick said; "let it drop."

Carson's hands came up quickly to the gunbuckle. He let the belt fall heavily to the floor. His face held a sudden light of hope, suspecting, perhaps, that Dick would not shoot him without a gun.

"Kick it over to your table," Dick said.

Carson kicked it, the gun and belt slid on the smooth floor to rest under the table.

Dick unbuckled his own guns then. He laid them carefully on the bar. But that would be too handy. He half turned to drop them behind the counter.

He spun around to see Carson mak-

ing a stooped run for the gun under the table, looking clumsy in his haste.

Dick met him a few feet short of the table, pushed him off balance. Carson sprawled awkwardly over a chair and stretched out on the floor. He scrambled quickly to his feet.

They paused, facing each other, and Carson suddenly looked immense, towering a half foot over Dick. His

arms bent slightly at the elbows, his fists clenched.

Dick waited for the charge. Maybe what he lacked in weight and reach, his slight body could make up in speed. That was the gamble now, and everything was at stake.

Carson came lumbering forward. Dick held his ground until the last moment, then doubled and stepped sideways. Carson went half past him before he was jarred by Dick's fist coming straight from the shoulder. Dick's fists struck repeatedly against Carson's ribs, beneath his armpit. He saw Carson wince with pain, heard him groan. Carson turned toward him, his hand raking down across Dick's face. The fingernails tore flesh, and Dick felt the warm, sticky sensation of blood.

DICK STEPPED in again, and ran smack into Carson's fist. It felt as if his head was going to rock off his shoulders. Carson pressed the advantage of his reach, throwing blows to Dick's face before he could move back.

The saloon came back into focus. Carson was rushing on him, his face a grimace, one fist cocked. Dick went under it by instinct. He brought his head up and forward, catching Carson in the neck.

Carson staggered backward, holding his hands to his neck, uttering a strangled cry. He was blinded with tears of pain.

Dick followed him. He pulled Carson's hands down with his left hand, and hit him with his right. He hit him again and again, until the blood spouted in a dozen places frm Carson's features.

Dick let go of the front of Carson's coat, finally. Carson crumpled to the floor. He weakly pulled his hands to his throat, a little less than aware. He made a horrible sound as he tried to draw air through his throat.

Dick lifted a partly full beer mug off the bar, carried it over to Carson, and splashed it into his face, making him sputter and cough. He reached down and grabbed him, noticing the blood on his hands. Carson was heavy and limp, but Dick found he could move him by his armpits.

With his back he pushed open the batwings, pulling Carson across the porch, his boots clumping as his legs dragged down the steps. Dick let him flop. Dirt stuck to the blood on his head when he rolled in his torment.

A crowd had gathered now. Dick looked around at the ring of faces. He saw the bartender and Bastion, but they made no move, probably had no thought to help Carson. There were merchants and bewhiskered farmers, several of the latter wearing grins. They had suffered most beneath the pressure of Carson's thumb.

Carson's groans ceased. He tried to sit up.

"Get his horse, somebody," Dick said.

Dick watched Carson reach full consciousness. Then one of the men came through the crowd with Carson's big gelding.

Dick said, "I'm giving you the same proposition you gave everybody else. Get out of town and don't come back. You held a lot of power in this town, but there isn't one man you can call your friend." He motioned to the men. "Put him on."

Four men grabbed him with willing hands, lifted him into the saddle. Carson slumped wearily, his feet pawing to find the stirrups. One of the men cracked the horse's rump with the flat of his hand, yelled, "Yahoo!" and the horse sprung forward.

Dick watched until Carson was past the last building, then started for the hardware store. Halfway across the street he remembered he had forgotten his guns. He stopped a moment, then shrugged. He had no use for them.

He hurried up the steps and pushed through the door. Dora was waiting,

waiting there in his own hardware store, flushed with relief.

"Oh, Dick! You're hurt!" Her hands went tenderly to his face.

"It's all right," Dick said. He figured he must look pretty bad—Carson had got in some good licks. But he sure didn't *feel* bad. How could a man feel bad when he had a growing hardware store and a girl like Dora to help look after it.

"And, Dora," he said, "I didn't use the guns."

★

BEAR BUSCOE--CATTLE MAN

(*continued from page 39*)

Tim made a fortune with that herd of his. Seems they could be turned into those soft steaks that melted in your mouth. Fetched fancy prices all over the world. But when the last one was et up, no more. You can read it all in the Cattleman's Gazette. They kept them old papers in the firehouse in Dallas. Come to think of it, that firehouse burned down, so you got to take my word for it.

WE FINALLY git on our way. For two days we travel and on the third day we see a sad sight. There on some rocks is a man, a female critter, and a kid. All a-cryin' as if the judgement day had a come.

"Find out what's wrong," Bear Buscoe tells me.

So I git off my horse and speak to what passes for a man. But when I heard the sad story, I sit down next to 'em. They are a bunch of nesters. That slimy rat, Jed Slimpers from the Big Bar Ranch wants to git 'em off the land. So he gives the kid some matches and shows how they git lighted. The poor kid burned down the cabin. I tell that to my pal.

"Hugh," is all he says. But I knows what he means. When he is mad, he is angry. Off his horse he slides and begins to work.

With his bear hands he uproots one hundred trees. Then he takes out his pocket knife and starts to shave off the branches. He is a-goin' make them folks a new cabin. Comes night. Dark as can be but Bear Buscoe knows how to git light.

"Zssssss" he whistles and millions of fireflies come around and shine their lights till that sun comes up again. The cabin is finished. But not my pal. He puts his ear to the ground and listens.

"Water down there and I dig a well."

So he scoops out the dirt with his left hand and the water jumps right up.

We left them happy folks and headed south by north. I knows what is goin' happen. Big Bar Ranch is due for a lesson in justice. By noon we gits there. Jed Slimpers takes one look at Bear Buscoe and knows there's trouble on the ranch.

"Git everyone out of the ranch house pronto," orders my pal.

And all the men folks dash out because they feared somethin' terrible. They wuz right. Bear Buscoe stands in front of the place and tickles his nose twice. He gives one of those terrible sneezes. Like a tornado but wurst. The whole ranch house tumbles down to the ground.

"Teach you to show kids how to burn down a house," he says. "If I iver hear agin you doin' a mean thing, then I will git real mad," he warned that low down skunk, Jed Slimpers.

We rode away quiet like. Bear Buscoe says something to me that makes my spine git chilled.

"Lucky for that Jed Slimpers I had a cold in my nose or I would have blowed everything across the Rio Grande."

★

Special Feature

LYING JIM TOWNSEND... Newspaper Editor

by JOHN L. COONEY

ALTHOUGH there may be newspapers today that distort, or actually invent, news, none of them are as blatant about it as was the *Homer Mining Index* under the editorial guidance of J. W. E. Townsend, better known as "Lying Jim" Townsend. Townsend, incidentally, was said to be the person after whom Bret Harte patterned his character "Truthful James".

Lundy was a typical gold mining town near the California-Nevada border in the High Sierras. A number of the mines in the area were owned by an English company. While the mines were good producers, the rugged terrain and the heavy snowfall during seven months of the year ran the operating costs up to the point that the company realized something had to be done to assure the current stockholders, as well as to attract new investors. The solution was to start a newspaper, which would be circulated not only in the Lundy area, but also to all of the stockholders and prospective stockholders in England.

A complete plant was provided and Townsend was hired as editor. It's doubtful that the promoters could have found a better man for the particular job they wanted done.

Each issue of the *Index* carried advertisements from several grocery stores, two large dry goods stores, three or four banks, a wholesale house, millinery stores, haberdashers, hardware stores and several saloons.

It also printed schedules of services for five different churches and published a railroad timetable showing the daily arrival and departure of trains connecting Lundy with the entire United States.

All of this must have made excellent reading for the British investors, but the actual fact was that with the possible exception of the saloons, none of these business establishments existed. The express company, which maintained an office in Lundy, handled all of the banking as well as the shipping. There were no railroads and no churches. In fact, at this time the first gold-rush fever was over and Lundy had settled down to a somewhat monotonous existence, enlivened only by occasional shooting scrapes.

It was as a social reporter, however, that "Lying Jim" really hit his peak. An avid reader of the *Index* would note that the Lundy Opera House (also non-existent) often presented some of the most famous entertainers in the American theatrical world. On these

frequent occasions, Jim would describe the first-night festivities at great length including a report on the people attending and their costumes.

THESE ARTICLES made a wonderful impression on the trusting British investors, since they resembled stories of similar events appearing in the large metropolitan newspapers. And well they might have. Jim merely clipped his society reports from San Francisco newspapers and, by merely changing the names of the people involved, prepared the society page for the *Index*.

However, even those stockholders who were entirely convinced that Lundy was a booming metropolis must have puzzled over the last two pages of each issue.

This was the section in which Jim reported the real news of the area, often editorializing with an acid pen. He also used this section to dun delinquent subscribers by name and comment, often adversely, on his fellow citizens. Strangely enough, in an area and during a period when editing a newspaper was a precarious job at best, there is no record that Jim was ever assaulted, or even threatened, for his sarcastic and malicious articles.

While the *Homer Mining Index* no longer exists, one leading San Francisco daily newspaper will never forget it.

Several years ago, the paper ran a series of articles on the so-called "ghost towns" of the Sierras. An enterprising reporter built the history of Lundy almost entirely from the available files of the *Index* and had an artist copy the sketches of Lundy at its peak as they had appeared in "Lying Jim's" newspaper.

There was many a red face a few days after the story appeared when it was discovered that the paved streets and large buildings had existed only in the fertile imagination of "Lying Jim" Townsend. But the cruelest blow was to learn that the sketches, so carefully copied to illustrate the story, were actually sketches of San Francisco's southern neighbor and arch-rival—Los Angeles.

★

15 NEW, complete, action-packed stories
and the current issue features

ROGUE RANGER
by Gordon D. Shirreffs

TRAIL OF PAINTED ROCKS
Latest "Lee Winters" story
by Lon Williams

These, and 18 others appear in the February

REAL WESTERN STORIES

TIME FOR A SHOWDOWN

by MAT RAND

Sheriff Callahan couldn't move against a killer without proof. But now fate was putting justice into his hands.

SHERIFF JOHN CALLAHAN was busy filling his cartridge belt when the door to his office opened. His deputy, Ben Morgan, had ridden hard to bring him the news.

"Jerry Slaff is alive! He's back here with about fifty armed men. All from across the border and they've taken over. You can't enter or leave town without their permission. The telegraph wires were cut and you can't get a message out of Gulch Creek. What are you going to do about it?"

The sheriff continued with his cartridge belt. Then he checked his Colt and buckled on the belt. For seven years he had waited for a day of reckoning and now it had finally come.

"Jerry has a right to justice," he said as he walked toward the window. "Wonder how Max Hill feels about it?"

Down the main street of Hartstown rode a young man on a magnificent stallion. He was young and his skin had been burned brown by the hot sun of Mexico. Behind him were a dozen other men from beyond the Rio

Grande. The young man stopped before the sheriff's office and dismounted. One of the men with him held the reins of his horse as Jerry entered.

"Hello, Sheriff," was the simple greeting. "I'm back. I'm going to get my thousand horses from Max Hill."

"With interest," added the sheriff.

There was no smile on the young man's face. He had planned this venture for a long time. Revenge is not something to sweeten the human soul.

"I hope you won't interfere with me," snapped back the young man. "I'm certain you wouldn't want the town burned to the ground."

"Is that a threat?" challenged the sheriff.

"Take it anyway you want," retorted Jerry. "You didn't do anything when my father was killed, and he was one of your best friends. Why should you do anything now?"

The sheriff winced as the truth of the words struck home. He watched the young man and his protective group of riders go south along the one and only main street of the town. Then he returned to his office. His thoughts went back seven years.

The Hill outfit had been losing money. Half interest in the ranch was owned by some people in England. Max Hill ran the ranch and owned the other interest. There were people who said that he and his foreman, Joe Denters, were milking the ranch. But Max claimed that rustlers were gnawing at his livestock. Other ranchers also demanded action. They were powerful. Then on that tragic Thursday, a group of men struck at a small cabin where Herman Slaff lived with his young son, Jerry. Herman had built up a stock of a thousand horses. He claimed he did so by clever trading. Max and other ranchers said Herman was nothing but a rustler. The small cabin was burned to the ground; the horses vanished, and the body of Herman Slaff swung from the limb of a tree.

The boy vanished, though it was known that riders of the Hill outfit had been out looking for him. Some of the small homesteaders demanded action to punish the killers. It was rumored that Max Hill, Joe Denters, and Pete Chappel had taken care of that lynching party. But a rumor was one thing...and legal proof another. Sheriff John Callahan knew it would be useless to arrest Max Hill and the others on mere hearsay.

As for the boy, Jerry, all kinds of stories began to come across the border. Finally it was learned he had been adopted by Juan Martinez who owned large ranching interests in Mexico. It must be the vaqueros from Mexico who were riding with Jerry for his revenge.

PETE CHAPPEL was sitting alone at a table in the *Crimson Cafe* when Jerry entered. Normally at this hour the place should have been filled; but stories had circulated and there was tension in the air. Pete Chappel had his two hands on the table. In his right hand was a derringer. He looked at the young man whom he hardly recognized.

"They say you came back to get me," were the words he managed to get past his lips.

The young man's right hand wasn't close to his holster. He was fixing his eyes on a man he had seen hundreds of times in his mind.

"You helped lynch my father. Why shouldn't you pay the penalty?"

Pete Chappel figured he could fire before the young man in front of him reached for his gun.

"Should you be thinking of getting me," suggested Jerry, "I might remind you of the men in town with me. They would take care of you, then leave you for the vultures. Every one of them is a man who has felt the sting and lash of injustice. That's why they rode with me to help me avenge *my* wrong."

Pete swung the gun into action.

There was but one shot and he fell to the floor. Jerry was startled and he went for his gun.

"As the law, *I* had to get him," said the reassuring voice of the sheriff from the balcony. "He went for you and would have shot you."

There was no thanks on the lips of the young man. He had been cheated out of one of his victims. There would be two more. For he had sent a message to the Hill ranch.

"We could make a break for it and reach Fort Benton," suggested Joe Denters to his boss. "I don't feel like dying right now. We could get soldiers and a United States Marshal. They can't do this to us."

"But they are," corrected Max Hill. "Remember I sent out three of our men for help, and riderless horses returned. I don't think they finished those riders. Probably holding them captive. But it worked. The rest of our bunch have vanished. Told me it wasn't their fight. So what're we going to do? The message said if we came to the *Crimson Cafe* we would have a chance for our lives. Otherwise we'll be burned right here in the ranch house. Come on, Joe! I think we can outsmart that kid. Too bad we didn't find him when we searched."

Max and Joe dismounted from their horses outside the *Crimson Cafe.* They tied the reins to the convenient hitching rail. Hill took a small bottle from his saddle bag. He was conscious of being watched by a group of armed men. He and Joe entered the cafe.

"I see you two are here," were the words that greeted them.

Max Hill showed the bottle he was holding and explained its purpose.

"There's nitroglycerine in this bottle. You try anything and I'll throw the bottle outside and blow up those men who came with you."

"That's a threat to kill," said the unexpected voice of the sheriff. "Give me that bottle; otherwise consider yourself under arrest."

Joe Denters went for his gun. Jerry was behind the sheriff who had quickly shifted his position. That made it difficult for the young man to shoot without injuring the sheriff. John Callahan was quick as lightning and Denters fired wild as he was hit in the chest.

"Give me that bottle or fight," challenged the sheriff.

MAX HILL was uncertain as to what to do. He had figured on how to handle Jerry. Before he could decide, the warm muzzle of the Colt was against the pit of his stomach. And the strong right hand of the sheriff wrenched the bottle away. Max Hill tried to recover the bottle and the gun spoke its message of doom. He fell back against the table and slumped into a chair. Life was ebbing away!

"Before it's too late," suggested the sheriff, "you might try to right the wrong you did. I have a paper prepared. You sign it. You give Jerry all the livestock left on your ranch."

The sheriff placed the paper on the table and thrust a pencil into the dying man's hand. When he finished scrawling his name he was gone.

A large group of men leading livestock had crossed the Rio Grande into Mexico. Next to Jerry rode his foster father.

"You are now satisfied, my son," remarked Juan Martinez. "You are now a man. You will marry Rosita and have many muchachos. For there is justice in this world."

"I am satisfied now, father," replied the young man. "What I was in the past died with those men. Perhaps it is good their blood is not on my hands. The sheriff was truly a friend."

Ben Morgan looked out the window. All was peaceful now in Hartstown. But there was a puzzled look on his face.

"I'll never know if you planned to get those three or eliminated them in the execution of your duties. The gov-

ernor seems satisfied you upheld the law."

"Justice was finally done and that's all that counts," snapped back the sheriff. "The kid's father was my best friend. He wouldn't have wanted blood on his son's hands."

★

MIRROR MAGIC

Special Feature by Bess Ritter

WHEN THE traders who travelled westward in the 1850s introduced the plains Indian to the looking glass, they never realized that the Redskin would find so many practical new uses for it: for once it was discovered that mirrors reflect sunlight, and that the resulting flash can be visible a long way off, it was used the way moderns employ the telephone. It attracted attention, gave warning, and when the number of flashes were determined beforehand, it also issued explicit directions in regard to every pursuit of life that was nearest and dearest to the heart of any Indian: namely, hunting, war, feasting, and—of course—love.

When an Indian went a-wooing, he seated himself on some little hillock near the camp, where he could be in full view of the tepee of his sweetheart. Then he flashed a square of light directly inside it. The second flash went to the left. The third, to the right. Then he quietly waited, while the girl in the case suddenly decided that she had to go out for wood or water—which was obviously right near the place where he was waiting.

Should an Indian desire to call his friends to a feast, he could tell his guests exactly when the food was piping hot and ready, by relying on a previous mirror flash arrangement, which confirmed the invitation and told them that the time to come was now.

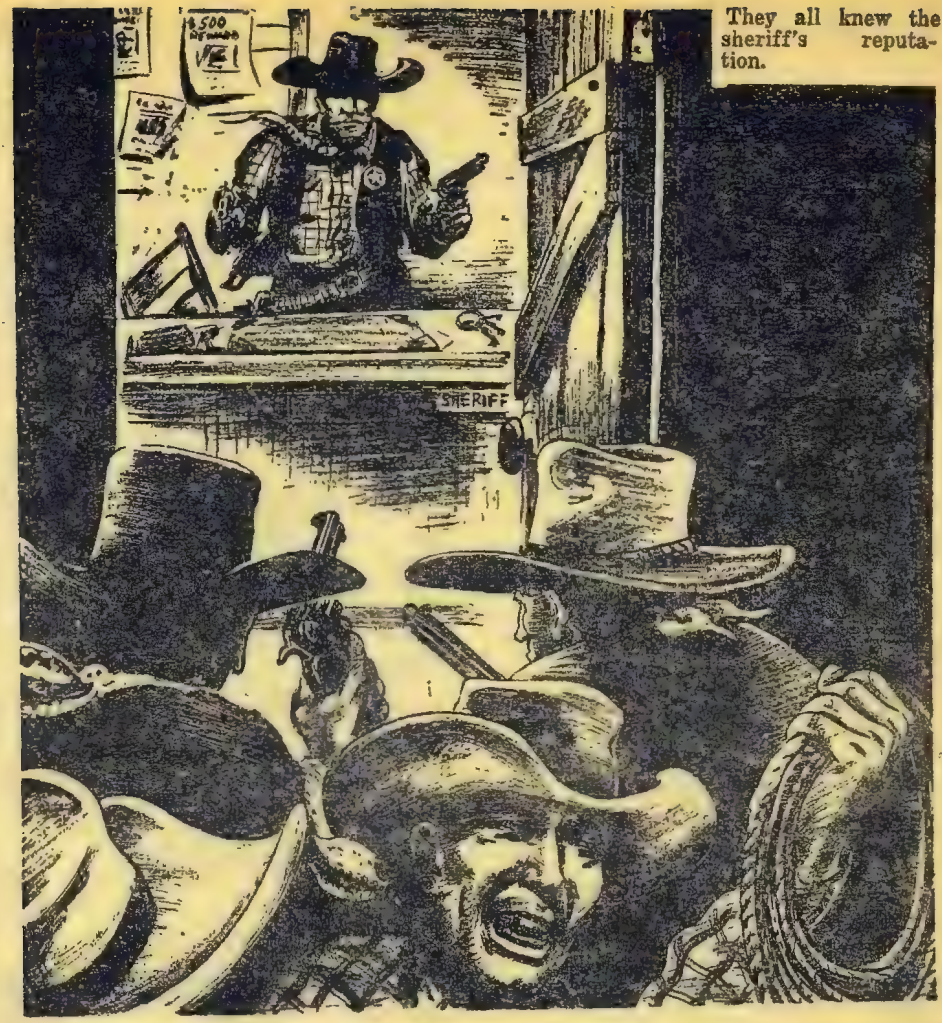
Information in regard to game when a group of Indians hunted was communicated in a very similar manner: the scouts who were sent in advance flashed back whatever information they discovered: if it consisted of four bands of buffalo, for example, four distinct flashes were relayed back to the party. This indicated the quantity. A fluttering motion followed, which was interpreted as "buffalo." Other game was identified by different types of signals, and the direction was determined by the way the glass was turned.

The warring Indian also employed well-planned-out mirror signals: should the advance guard of scouts discover a large number of the enemy close at hand, the mirror was given a tremulous motion instead of distinct flashes. This told the party in the rear to scatter at once and secrete themselves. If there were distinct flashes, they were to hurry forward, moving to the left or right as the flashes indicated. Obviously, such signals had to be changed frequently, and were planned with great care the night before the battle.

It's interesting to note that when the American troops discovered such signalling that they were considered to be ingenious enough to be adapted and developed into the heliograph—which was widely used in the Boer War by the British. However, the Indian's top use for the mirror, despite all this was the same as the white man's: a way that helped him obtain delight from his own personal adornment.

In turn, of course, the mirror must be adorned as well, by placing it in a wooden frame complete with a handle that was often as much as a full foot in length. This was carved into what was really an exquisite work of art, and then beautifully painted and enhanced with handsome brass tack studding.

★



They all knew the sheriff's reputation.

EDUCATION

HALL DANE

The town's lawman ought to set a good example, was the way the bartender saw it.

THE SHERIFF'S rock hard fist struck the drunk on the point of his jaw and the man collapsed as though torpedoed. "Anybody else got anything to say about the daughter of Matt Grimes?" he inquired, looking contemptuously down at his victim.

The bar room was silent as the grave. Saddletramps and drifters for the most part, the hangers on in the *Bat Wing* saloon saw no reason to risk the drunk's fate. They filed out.

The sheriff sidled up to the bar. "Whiskey," he said. "Straight."

Without a word the bartender poured out the drink.

The sheriff tilted his glass and its contents went down in one long swallow. He wiped his mouth with the back of a hairy hand.

"I have had all this sort of talk I am going to stand," he announced. "If any of them so much as thinks a wrong thing about that girl I personally will mop the floor with them."

"Aw, Charley," said the bartender placatingly, "Don't get yourself steamed up for nothing. The boys didn't mean anything."

"I know what they meant," said the sheriff belligerently.

"He was drunk," said the bartender pointing at the crumpled figure on the floor.

"Makes it worse," said the sheriff; "for her name to be on the lips of such scum is something I will not tolerate."

The bartender straightened up and his eyes narrowed. "Speaking as sheriff of this here county or as just plain Charley Hawkins?"

The sheriff glared. "As both," he said loud enough for all to hear; "and I mean every damn word of it."

The bartender thought it over. "He was in no condition to fight back."

"What do I care? He wasn't too damn drunk to befoul the name of the finest woman in these parts."

"Maybe you got a point there," the bartender conceded, "But you got to remember one thing. He didn't know she was that." The sheriff refused to argue the matter. "What I said still goes."

The bartender shrugged and went about the business of cleaning up the empty glasses and mugs he had placed on the far end of the bar. "No skin off my nose," he said philosophically, "but you oughtn't to forget that you are the law."

"Just what do you mean saying that?"

"You're the sheriff, ain't you?"

"You're damn right I'm the sheriff."

"Seems like it's your duty then to set a good example for the rest of us here citizens, as you might say."

THE SHERIFF snorted disdainfully. "Don't give me that hogwash. I have been packin' this star for more years than I can remember, and I never have felt no need for advice as to how to run my office."

The bartender smiled. "There's always a first time."

"Meaning what?"

The bartender took off his coat and laid it carefully on the bar. "Just this. I am a law-abiding man, and rough loud talk in my place of business ain't pleasing to me none at all."

"You aimin' to do something about it?"

The bartender came out from behind the bar and stood facing the other. "I heard tell once," he said, "that you was something of a man who didn't need no gun to speak for him."

Without a word, the sheriff took off his gunbelt and laid it on the bar. "You heard right."

"In that case"...said the bartender, and his fist clipped the sheriff high on the cheek bone. Hawkins staggered back.

The bartender followed up his advantage. In swift succession a series of blows struck the sheriff, and he found himself on his back looking up at the bartender, who stood watching him warily.

Anger shone in the sheriff's eyes but the bartender didn't seem to mind. "Where I come from, men that talk big are able to back it up with their fists."

The sheriff painfully rose to his feet. "Seems to me," he said, "I remember something of the sort, but it was a long time ago. I was younger then."

The bartender smiled. "The trouble with you Charley is that you are too damn romantic. You and me both know that dame is no good; yet here you go slamming drunks around and playing He-tiger in this sheep corral. Any way you figure it, it just don't make sense."

The sheriff bellied up to the bar. "This bar still open?"

"I reckon so; what'll you have?"

"I need medical attention," said the

sheriff, "but I'll settle for a shot of whiskey."

The bartender poured the drink; when the glass was full, he looked at the sheriff keenly a few moments and then filled another glass for himself.

"Mud in your eye."

"Salud," said the sheriff.

"This here bar," said the bartender, "is one place it ain't no crime to speak the truth."

"If I was ten years younger, or even five," said the sheriff, "I would argue the point with you. But that last lick you gave me on the jaw damn near jarred me loose from any interest in any truth at all."

"It's all in the point of view," said the bartender.

"Lying on your back," the sheriff said, "and looking up at a ranny like you with two clubs for fists ain't no view point useful to me."

"Education," said the bartender modestly, "is a wonderful thing."

The sheriff grinned. "You really think she is bad?"

The bartender winked. "If she hadn't a been," he said, "I wouldn't a married her."

They laughed so loud they woke the drunk.

★

WESTERN BRANDS AND CHANGES

Special Feature by J. J. Mathews

THE PURPOSE of a brand was to show ownership of stock, and an intelligent rancher would try to figure out a brand that would be difficult for the rustler to change. One of the first recorded brands in Texas was that of Richard H. Chishom, of Gonzales, and entered before the Alamo in 1832. The purpose of public registration of brands was so that cattlemen could detect a blotched or illegal brand. In Texas, the brands were recorded by counties while other states had state brand books.

Some of the brands of the southwest were based upon objects. One would be very dumb not to figure out that a scissors was the name of a brand made in that object! And there was likewise a Bible Brand; Broken Arrow Brand; Hat Brand; Rocking Chair Brand; and Anvil Brand.

Changing brands illegally wasn't dangerous—provided you didn't get caught. Yet that statement is probably an understatement, for there were vigilante groups who went into action when the cattle rustlers and horse-thieves got too active. Out in Montana, it turned into murder. The Vigilante Group was known as Stuart's Stranglers. When they heard about a stock thief, they went into action—tracked him down, caught him, and hung him. And upon his clothing they left a placard labeled either *"Horse Thief"* or *"Cattle Thief."* The simple result of this action was to sweep the range clear of rustlers.

When it came to changing brands, the rustlers didn't have to use running irons. Bailing wire or telegraph wire when heated would do the trick. But there was still another way to alter a brand. Will James wasn't exactly ashamed of the fact that he had done some rustling. The old man who taught him a new stunt did it with a little bottle of acid. He would dip a stick into the bottle of acid and work over the old brand. Net result was a new brand that looked as old as the first and blended with it.

Of course there were a lot of jobs connected with putting the rustler out of business. Anything from being a private range detective like Tom Horn, to being a cattle inspector like Dee Harkey. But being an undertaker, depending upon dead rustlers, didn't pay for one simple reason. Who was going to stand the cost of taking down the body from a tree and giving the corpse a decent funeral?

Special Feature

A TURKEY-SHOOTING MATCH

by Zachary Strong

AS THE nature of a country changes, so too may change the way in which people find relaxation in certain types of sport. When a man had a rifle and a pistol, it was only natural that he would look for some kind of sport in which he could show his skill. And shooting matches for side bets were not unusual in the small western community of yesterday.

Toyah was one of those terrible wicked infant towns; it was only a few months old, but it contained over a dozen saloons and gambling halls. That meant that the cowboy who wanted relaxation had the opportunity—provided he also had the cash—of drinking alcohol in any of its various forms, falling for a dance girl, or trying to see if he could beat the other fellow at poker. This was New Year's day in Toyah. The question arose: What kind of sport shall we provide to usher in the end of a year?

Mr. Miller, who was justice of the town, decided upon a sport that was almost dying out—a turkey shooting match. It was something that great-great-great-great-grandfather enjoyed. A man would put up posters that on a certain day there would be a "Turkey Shooting Match." You paid a fee and got the chance to shoot at a turkey with your gun. In the days of the flintlocks and percussion cap guns it really required skill to get your bird.

But in Toyah, most of the people, including the large number of railroaders who had hit the town on the T.P.R.R. carried pistols. So this match was to be one in which you could use your sixgun, derringer, single shot, or whatever you had. But Mr. Miller was no dope. He had sent to Dallas, six hundred miles east, after the turkeys and they set him back three dollars each; so he figured out the distance at which the customers would shoot in order that most of them would miss. Tickets were sold at twenty-five cents each. If you were such a good shot as to kill a turkey, you were then entitled to a free shot until you missed.

Into the wicked town of Toyah came Charles A. Siringo. He could handle a sixshooter, ride the toughest horse, and look any badman straight in the face—even if that man were crosseyed. Charley stopped at the Alverado House in Toyah. It was run by old man Newell, who had a pretty fifteen-year-old daughter. Bulah had a pair of sparkling eyes and Charley fell for her. What happened? Better let him tell the story in his own words.

"Miss Bulah made a remark in my presence that she wished someone would win a fat turkey and give it to her. Now was my time to make a 'mash,' so I assured her that I would bring in a dozen or two and lay them at her feet. When the shooting commenced, I was on hand and secured the ticket which was marked number eleven.

"Everything being ready, Mr. Miller placed the turkey in an iron box with nothing but its head visible and then set the box thirty-five yards from the line. The shooting had to be done with pistols 'off hand.'

"Ten shots were fired and still Mr. Turkey was casting shy glances to-

wards the large crowds of several hundred men. Mr. Miller wore a pleasant smile when he shouted number eleven.

"I stepped forward trembling like an aspen leaf, for fear I would miss and thereby fail to win Miss Bulah's admiration. I was afraid, should the bullet miss its mark, that the few dozen birds would be all killed before my time would come around again, there being so many men waiting for a shot. At last I cut loose and off went the turkey's head, also Mr. Miller's happy smile. You see he lacked two bits of getting cost for the bird.

Another one was put up, and off went his head. This was too much for Mr. Miller, two birds gone already and only two dollars and six bits in the pot. He finally, after humming and hawing awhile, said: 'Gentlemen, I don't like to weaken this early in the game, but you all know I have got a large family to support and consequently I will have to rule this young man out of the ring. He's too slick with a pistol to have around a game of this kind anyway.'

"I hated to quit of course, but it was best, for I might have missed the very next time, and as it was, Bulah would think that I would have carried out my promise if I had been allowed to keep on."

Does this description of the western sport sort of get your memory a bit disturbed? Something in it that is familiar. Sure, for if you go around to some fairs, concessions, and carnivals, then you have seen a modern version of the sport. A little pig is in a lock-up. If you hit the door, out he comes! Only instead of bullets you use baseballs. As for turkey? If you want it you either go to the butcher or the restaurant.

★

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THE LONG BLADE

by A. A. BAKER

THE DEAD MAN was thin. A white sheet, crimped down over each bony rib, reflected light from the narrow window boarded through, to hold the sawdust packing of the thick walls. The dripping water tower overhead, punctuated the doctor's words.

"The knife blade," he rolled the corpse over and held a narrow rule against the biceps, "had to be at least twelve inches long."

Judge Bartlett laid a warm hand on the icy arm and studied the white face. "Stranger—" he muttered. "How long'll he keep, Doc?"

"In here?" The doctor glanced at the heavy, sawdust packed timbers. "Maybe forty-eight hours."

The judge nodded, lifted the oiled wooden ratchet and walked out to the street. The Texas heat slapped over the dust. He pulled his black hat firmly onto his bushy head, flicked the long coat tails in a futile attempt to brush off the cloying odor of death, and moved thoughtfully toward the Mesa County Courthouse. He kicked open the heavy door to his chambers, crossed the room to lower a green shade, and slid into the chair behind the flat-topped desk.

Constable John Savage eased back in his usual round chair and raised dark gray eyes to the judge's gloomy face. "Find out anything down at Doc Benson's morgue?" he asked softly.

The judge looked startled. "You been waiting here? Why the hell weren't you out questioning those Mexicans?"

"Figured you'd ask that," muttered the lean constable. "I went out and rounded 'em all up. Got 'em in the calaboose. Seven Mexicans and one Indian. Every one with a knife that'd—"

"Oh, don't tell me!" groaned the judge. "All right," he sighed, "give me the details. Not like you got it figured, but the facts."

"Not before you pour a drink." The constable's tone was brusk. "It'll take a drunken man to sort this one out."

With a studied motion, the heavy-set judge flipped the cork from a bottle, poured two glasses and edged one cautiously across the desk. The constable drank.

"All right, Judge. This dead man's coming across the mesa country from Dallas. About four miles south of here, he runs into a crew of Mexicans bailing volunteer hay. Now, maybe he's never seen a haybailer working, so he stops and gets friendly with the crew. Well—"

John Savage's gray eyes narrowed in thought as he continued. "He leaves the crew about sundown, heading for town and a room. One or more of those Mexicans follow him and catch up about a mile out. Maybe he figures they're coming in for a drink and lets them close in. That's it. He's stabbed right off that horse, stabbed again on the ground, his money's stolen and he's left there. The killer..."

"*The* killer?" Judge Bartlett pinched

his flushed cheek. "Which one? Seven Mexicans and one Indian. They'll sit in jail till Mexico becomes part of Texas..."

"Like mummies," finished the constable.

The judge, thumb and fingers prying at the cork, drew in a breath and exploded. "I've got to think! See you at court time."

SEVERAL hours later, Constable Savage, one eye cocked toward the judge's chambers, laid out his evidence on the long table in front of the bench. Eight knives and a garroting string that belonged to the Indian. The weapons glinted against the sharp polish of the wood and reflected against the shiny bars of the prisoner's cage. Overhead, polished lamps caught the silent glow of the room.

The constable walked out through a side entrance and across the alley to the adobe jail. Soon, the clumping feet of the seven suspects filed through the same door and were ushered into the barred cage by the constable. Again, he stared at the assortment of knives on the table, then strode down the long aisle and threw open the street doors. A few early spectators nodded and hurried toward the front. They settled down into the spaced chairs and returned the sullen stares of the seven murder suspects.

The Mexicans were squat, the Indian tall and lean. Their rough denim work clothes were enhanced by bits of colored stitching over the shoulders and around the pockets. The Indian had a conch belt of silver holding his pale orange blouse in a flare. He disdained the bench and squatted against the wall.

When the square clock behind the judge's bench bonged out the hour of two, John Savage walked to the door and rapped sharply. The judge swept into the courtroom. His bushy hair had been carefully brushed down. His string tie formed a neat bow and the black ends dangled onto the snowy breast of his shirt. His face was set sternly as he moved to his bench and reached for the gavel.

As Judge Bartlett banged the gavel, he threw a smoldering glance at the half seated prosecuting lawyer and announced. "Court's in session." He glared at the ensuing noise made by the room full of people seating themselves. When the scuffling and creaking had subsided, he threw a curious glance at the barred cage holding the seven field hands.

"What's the charge against these men?" And was suddenly tossing a friendly smile at the Mexicans.

"Suspected murder, Your Honor," the county prosecutor, Blodgett, announced drily.

"Stand *up*, when you address the court!" the judge howled.

Blodgett rose, in gangling awkwardness, and repeated. "Suspected murder, Your Honor."

"Murder's a harsh word, Mr. Prosecutor!" The judge said, darting a sympathetic glance at the prisoners. A hopeful flicker appeared in the eyes of the man on the end. Blodgett shook his head and turned a harried look at the constable.

"May I introduce a witness, Your Honor?"

"Of course. Let's see what evidence you have against these—working men."

"Constable John Savage, will take the stand and be sworn—I mean, sworn in."

The clerk intoned rapid words over the Bible under Savage's hand, then seated himself in the heavy chair on the raised dais that creaked against the judge's bench.

"Now, Mr. Constable, will you tell what you know of these men and their actions during the last twenty-four hours?"

JOHN SAVAGE explained how he had picked the men up, four miles east of town. The prosecutor nodded. "I

understand, but tell us one thing," he paused majestically, "were these men armed? *That's* what I want to know. Did they carry long-bladed knives that could cut their way into the flesh of a man, and..."

"You are *not* on the stage, Mister Blodgett!" The judge slapped his gavel and pointed its handle at the young man. "This court is not easily influenced by theatrics. Please be seated. *I* will ask the constable some questions." While the bewildered Blodgett slumped into his chair, the judge threw another benelovent glance toward the cage and the smiles, that had begun to rise with hope, broadened the flat faces of the prisoners.

"Now, Mr. Constable," the judge began. "Did you relieve these men of yonder weapons arranged on the table?"

"I did—Your Honor."

"Can you identify these knives?"

"Yes!" snapped the constable.

"Then do so!" roared the judge. "There! That knife on the end. Whose knife is that?"

For long seconds, the constable stared at the knife. It was a blue-handled weapon with a short, broad blade. The crowded room hushed. In the back, a whiskered man spat heavily at a spittoon. The prisoners dropped their eyes.

John Savage was now thoroughly bewildered. Was the judge trying to free a guilty man? Perhaps all of the prisoners weren't involved but one of them most certainly was.

"Well—Mr. Constable?" The judge's voice crackled.

"No." Savage answered tersely. "No. I can't tell whose knife it is." Heat entered his voice. "When I took those knives away, I was too busy to tag them!"

"Can you tell me which prisoner owns *any* of those knives?" growled the judge. "Take any one. That long blade for instance. Surely, you should remember which prisoner carried that one?"

"No, I don't," was the short answer.

The judge turned an eye toward the prisoners. "A foot-long blade. Which of you men owns that knife?"

Dully, stoldily, the seven men stared back at the judge then, collectively, dropped their eyes to the floor.

"Mr. Prosecutor!" The judge rose with a shout. The lawyer seemed to have shriveled. His face was red from the heat of the room. He was a limp bag of creased clothes trying to rise with dignity.

"Yes, Your Honor?"

"Can these men understand American? Have they a defense attorney?"

"Judge..." began the prosecutor.

"Just an all-around miscarriage of justice!" boomed the judge. He brought the gavel down on the block like he was driving nails. "Release these men!" he shouted. "Get them out of that cage. Hurry up, unlock it!"

The constable stared, then went to the cell door. The judge began shuffling angry hands through the papers on his bench. He yelled at the bailiff. "Where's them release forms? What the hell kind of court *is* this? Help Savage get those men out!"

The spectators were suddenly on their feet and churning out into the aisle. Angry mutters and glares were shot at the fuming judge. He continued his tirade and the harshly banging gavel broke down, sending splinters from the bench's edging. The gavel head split and rolled across the floor.

"I'll have order!" he bellowed. Reluctantly, the men shuffled back and began to quiet.

SAVAGE led the happily grinning prisoners from the barred cage and lined them up in front of the table.

"Now, amigos," the judge brushed a hand through his crop of hair and smiled on the grinning Mexicans. "You understand English?" They nodded

and Judge Bartlett continued. "We've all had a bad morning. There is, really, no evidence against you. You are released." His voice was soft and the prisoners returned his smile.

He rose, and turned to go, when he was halted by a question.

"Senor Judge?" The broad face of the speaker carried the scar of a slit through his facial muscles. His hat was held against his waist differentially.

"Ye-ess?" The judge returned.

"The knives—they will be returned?" The smile became oily.

"Oh. Yes, of course. Pick up your knives and then leave."

An angrier mutter rose from the citizens but the judge threw a quick, hooded glance at Savage and a huge weight seemed to lift from the constable's chest as he caught that look. He moved forward.

Hurriedly, the prisoners snatched the knives off the table and their blades disappeared under the short denim jackets.

"There—now." The judge's voice was cool but shot through the room like an arrow. The constable clamped a heavy hand onto the shoulder of the stocky, scarred Mexican. Stunned, the man felt the long knife yanked from his waist and, with a protesting lurch, he was thrust back into the barred cage.

"*There's* your case, Mr. County Prosecutor!" The judge pointed a long arm at the sullen man again behind bars. "That knife was the only one long-bladed enough to have done the killing. *He* claimed the knife and..."

"I deed not do eet alone!" The accused screamed. "Jailisco was weeth me!" He pointed a shaking finger at the Indian.

"Well, now, thanks!" The judge beamed. "Lock up the Indian with him." He turned away, still grinning. "There's your case and the only lengthy thing about it was that knife-blade!" His shoulders were shaking with mirth as he headed for his chambers.

★

Keen Morgan was an outlaw and a cow-thief, but there was a limit beyond which he wouldn't go. And when Lew Bradlow wanted to kidnap Jan Tolson, Morgan suddenly realized it was time to switch sides —even though it meant that both rustlers and ranchhands would be gunning for him!

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You'll find it complete, leading off the February

DOUBLE • ACTION WESTERN

WESTERN BRAIN-MIXERS

Quiz Feature by James Hines

1. What famous gunfighter, without stopping, once rode thirty-five miles in his underwear?
2. What does a cowpuncher mean, when he says, "I've busted my cinch?"
3. What noted gunfighter's father was a Methodist minister and later a lawyer?
4. Name three noted frontiersmen who were killed in the defense of the Alamo.
5. What does the term "arroyos," mean?
6. How old was John Wesley Hardin, the noted gunfighter, when he killed his first man?
7. In the oldtime cowboy song, "The Old Chisholm Trail", when did the cowboy start up the trail?
8. In cowboy lingo, what does the following mean: cavvieyard, reata, rawhide, snake?
9. What is a nester?
10. True or False? John Wesley Hardin, noted gunfighter, once practiced law?
11. Which two of our western states, were the last ones to be admitted to the Union?
12. True or False? Wild Hogs were so numerous in the early days of the West that settlers devised traps to catch them.
13. When and where did the famous Apache war chief Geronimo die?
14. What western state has the nickname the "Sagebrush State"?
15. What noted gunfighter, when he was twenty-five years old, was sentenced to twenty-five years in prison, and is said to have killed twenty-five men at that time?
16. What date did Congress set, as the day upon which white settlers could stake out a claim in the "Indian Territory"?
17. Can you name three western states that lead in the production of silver?
18. What western city has the greatest copper-mining camp in the world?
19. What two western states lead in the production of sheep?
20. When was John Wesley Hardin, known in the cow country as Wes Hardin, famous gunfighter, killed?

(Answers on page 130)

Sometimes when a man finds faith in himself, it's astonishing at the amount of courage he can show.

GUTS AND BOOTS

by Helene Huff

OLD DOC PETERS buried his head deeper into the pillow when a knock on the front door awakened him. He shrugged and turned over. "Reckon it's another shooting at the *Red Lady Saloon.* If I can't save 'em, then I gotta say they're laid out good." Seemed as how a doctor couldn't get a good night's sleep without a waking-up.

As the pounding became louder, he sleepily stuck out his feet and felt around for his boots. He pulled them on. Then he reached for the bottle on the floor and took a quick slug to wake him up. He wiped his mouth on his undershirt sleeve. He struck a match and lighted the kerosene lamp. Then he placed his specs on the end of his nose and shuffled his way to the door.

Emmy Lou Mertzon stood there, looking weepy and beautiful with her black hair unstuck from her long curls.

"Jumping Johnny," Doc said, "What you doing out in the middle of the night?"

"I've left Bob." Her eyes were red like she'd been crying.

"You what?" he exploded. "Why, Emmy, you can't go leaving Bob Williams. He's the sharpest shooting, biggest talking, putting-folks-under-his-thumb fellow in Rippling Springs. If'n he knows where you're at, he'll come busting in here and..." He adjusted his specs farther up his nose with a trembling hand. "I ain't no spring chicken and I ain't near ready to cash in my chips." He started to shut the door. "You scamper right on back to him."

Emmy wasn't any bigger than a short yearling, but she was strong. She pushed inside the door. "Doc, you've known me since the morning you

brought me yelling into the light of day. You can't want me to go back to Bob."

"You're hitched up proper to him. Don't see there's nothing else to do. What's he done to you?"

Emmy's hands went to her hips. "You're scared, Doc. You're plumb scared. Then it's true what folks have been saying all these years. That you're a sot and yellow and not a real doctor."

Doc swallowed, then took a deep breath. "Emmy, you ain't believing that."

"They say," she continued, her eyes shooting sparks, "that new Doc Canner what come riding into town in a buggy with a derby on his head and gloves on his hands and low-cut shoes and pants and coats that match—they say he's a real doctor with a paper to prove it. They say he's come here to wait for a coughing-death."

"Woman talk!" the doctor said belligerently. But he was wounded. Been practicing here in the Indian Territory going on twenty years, but folks was right. He hadn't had no real doctor training. Just read up on some medicine books and took them examinations that the medical board gave in the city. Cost him twenty-five bucks, it did, to get a license to practice medicine.

HE TOOK off his specs and polished them. "Emmy," he said at last, "I reckon folks is right. I ain't much of a doctor and I ain't got no guts."

Emmy's chin shot up. "You're wrong, Doc; all wrong. You have guts, plenty of them, but you ain't never had the call to use them. Well, you got the call now."

"I never calculated I'd get mixed up in woman trouble, even if you are like my own wife Melinda what went with the fever."

"That's why you've got to help me. 'Cause I am like your own kid, almost."

Doc shook his head dazedly. If his own wife had been like Emmy here, maybe he would have been brave; but she was one to back away from trouble, saying if'n you kept your own hands clean, you was doing your duty. Suddenly, Doc felt a feeling of strength flood through him. He'd never had anyone call his hand before and believe in him—believe that he could be something better than he was.

"What you want me to do, Emmy?"

"Bob's framed Lew Lewis. Claimed Lew was caught branding a calf what... Well, you know. Lew could change a brand real handy. But Bob planned it, I know he did." She blurted, "Bob and his gang are at Lew's hanging now, and..."

Doc stared at her. "Lew caught? But, Emmy, Lew ain't guilty. Why, there ain't a finer man betwist here and the Canadian. He don't hardly seem like no rustler."

"Oh, Doc you gotta save him. If anything happened to Lew, I..."

"Emmy, how come you hitched up with Bob when you could of had Lew?"

She sighed. "I guess I was flattered that Bob, the richest man in the country, took a fancy to me. And then when Lew said he wouldn't have nothing to do with me if I even so mucn as went riding with Bob, I blew up. Guess I just wanted to show Lew."

Doc went into the other room, strapped his gunbelt around his hips, and put on his hat. "Where's the necktie party at?"

"At the gap six miles south of town. But I don't think you can get there in time. There's nothing much we can do for Lew now excepting for me to leave Bob and the country. You got to help me."

"You stay put, Emmy. Maybe I can help Lew yet."

WHEN HE got to the gap, he saw Lew's body swinging from the tree. No sound broke the stillness. He rode his horse under Lew's body, slid his feet out of the stirrups, then stood up in the saddle. "Easy, boy," he said to the horse.

Taking out his pocket knife, Doc cut the rope and, as the dead weight fell into his arms, he slid his legs aross the saddle. The horse shied, then steadied.

Doc dismounted, then pulled the limp form off the horse's back. He laid Lew flat on the ground, then got a rock and placed his head on it. He felt for Lew's pulse and put his ear to his heart. Finally, he slid the noose from around the rope-burned neck.

"He ain't dead," Doc said. "Jest proves he ain't guilty, because he should of been cold by now." Doc took a bottle out of his coat pocket and poured some of the firey liquid down Lew's throat. Doc watched until he saw Lew unconsciously swallow it.

"Jumping Johnny, he's gonna make it," Doc cried. "Here, Lew; have a good slug." This time Lew coughed and his eyes opened. He grinned at Doc.

"Sure was swinging pretty," Doc commented drily. "Jest like a bird flying around."

"Doc," Lew spoke with effort, "one thing I gotta say. You either cure or kill a guy in a jiffy. That medicine you make up for everything from callouses to stopping up a gunwound sure brings quick results."

"Yeah." Then he was overcome with shame. "Lew, I ain't no real doc. Everybody knows it, but I done what I could to help people."

Lew grinned, then closed his eyes.

Doc was figuring. Still enough dark left to take Lew to his house without anyone knowing, if he rode down the alley and went in the back door. Take Lew a few days to get his neck loosened up. Then he sure would be a surprise to some folks, mainly Bob.

They'd think Lew was risen from the dead when he showed his face on the street. Doc laughed. Sure would be some joke on those who strung Lew up. He took a slug of his medicine, then draped Lew, stomach down, across the front of the saddle. Doc draped his coat over the middle of him. There wasn't anything he could do about the legs and arms hanging out.

When he got to his combination office-home, it was about sun-up time, but Doc didn't see anyone moving around. He opened his door, then locked it behind him. Emmy was curled up in a knot by the stove. He carried Lew in and put him on the bed. Then he took off his boots and belt and pulled up the cover.

EMMY OPENED her eyes as he came into the kitchen. "Lew..." she asked, her voice still heavy with sleep.

"In there." Doc motioned to her. She ran in to Lew. At the side of the bed, she looked appealing at Doc. "Is he..."

"Tough as a outlaw horse. He's gonna make it."

Her smile was tremendous. She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him on the forehead. "I knew you could do it, doc. I knew you could."

"Wasn't nothing, Emmy."

She looked at Lew, and ran her hand over his face. "We better get him away right now; I'll go with him."

Doc shook his head. "We can't go moving him." Jumping Johnny, he's had a hell of a shock being strung up by the neck. Reckon it'll take two or three days before he can take out."

"I'll take care of him."

Doc thought a minute. "It's ain't going to be real safe pertecting a hung outlaw and a runaway wife. It sure ain't going to lead to a healthful old age."

"Scared, Doc?" Emmy's voice was soft.

"Who, me?" He was relieved that he didn't feel at all scared. "Hell, no."

"Then it's settled; I'll stay here and nurse Lew. Nobody'll know we're here."

"Hope not. Well, I'll amble out on the town and see what's new floating around."

Although it was early morning, the hanging party was still celebrating at Bob's *Red Lady Saloon.* Doc noted that the town's only mirror was shot up. Bob was in high spirits. Doc reckoned he hadn't checked his rooms to see if Emmy was there.

"Have a drink, Doc," Bob called. "On the house. We just strung up Lew Sanders. Sure tied a neat knot. We been needing to get rid of him a long time now."

Doc started to the bar, then stopped. Somehow, he didn't feel the need for a drink. Maybe for the first time in his life, he could look at himself and like what he saw. "Don't reckon I will now," Doc allowed.

Bob yelled. "Not as potent as your own homemade brand, eh, Doc?" The men roared with laughter.

Doc looked steadily at Bob. "What'd Lew do?"

"Cattle rustling. Caught him red-handed and fixed him up without no waiting."

"Yeah." Doc's voice was dry. "You ain't never taken to Lew knowing Emmy was sweet on him before she tied up with you." Doc didn't know what had come over him. Here he was practically asking for a fight when he'd spent his life avoiding them.

Bob's face paled and his lips straightened out. "You drunken fake, you..." And then he laughed. "Guess you're more liquoured up than you know, Doc. It ain't like you to act this way."

Doc knew this was his chance to get out while he could still walk, but he

liked this new powerful feeling. "Lew was my friend, he wasn't an outlaw and you know it." He hooked his fingers in his gunbelt. "Looking for outlaws, they're swarming thick right here in this here room. Gunmen, rustlers, robbers, cheating gamblers. Right here."

The room was so still that Doc heard his stomach growl. He had clean forgot about eating breakfast.

"Get out, Doc," Bob commanded. "You're talking crazy. If it wasn't you, I would of..."

Doc hesitated. He wanted to stay, but he thought about Emmy and Lew back at his place. Right now they needed him. Maybe Emmy would need a brave man around to protect her if word leaked out she was there. His shoulders drooping, he nodded his head dully, walked over, drank the booze in a glass on the bar and staggered out.

Best thing, he thought; let them think he was tanked up. Calculated he was out of his mind. Couldn't afford to let them know he was a changed man yet. He'd take care of that after Emmy and Lew left the country.

Laughter followed him out the swinging door. "Old sot, spouting off like he was full of vinegar. Never knowed a bigger coward what could straddle the fence without slipping."

Doc grinned.

IT WAS A couple of hours later when Bob flung open Doc's door. "You seen Emmy?" he demanded.

"Emmy? Sure, I seen her yesterday in at the Tates General Mercantile Store. She was buying up some pink ribbon."

"Not yesterday," Bob said impatiently. "Last night? Today."

"Ain't she home?" Doc asked innocently.

"If she was, I wouldn't be hunting her! Give me a straight answer." He grabbed Doc by the front of his shirt.

"I ain't seen her recent."

At this moment, a bed spring squeaked. Bob let the Doc loose in a hurry and strode across the room to the door. Doc beat him to it. "Don't go in," he whispered. "That there's a lady friend in there. You got to think of her honorable name." He licked his lips and grinned slyly at Bob.

Bob's hand hesitated on the door. "Doc, you old devil. I wouldn't of known you had it in you."

Doc shrugged. "I ain't one to advertise none."

Bob turned and went out the front door. "If you see Emmy, you send her packing to me; I'll learn her to walk out on me when my back's turned."

Doc closed the door gently. Then he went across to the bedroom door. "They're closing in, Emmy. It ain't safe for you and Lew to stay here." He looked at Lew, who opened his eyes.

"How you feeling?"

Lew swallowed with difficulty. "I ain't running out. I got some personal debts to settle and a job to finish up."

Emmy knelt down. "If you love me, Lew, you'll take me away. Forget all that."

He looked at her a long time, then he reached up a hand and smoothed her hair. "It's because I do that I ain't leaving yet. I got to fix it so's you're a widow and can marry me legal before we go away. Besides, I ain't what you think."

"I don't care what you are," Emmy's voice was close to tears. "Lew, it might be you, not Bob. And what kind of life would I have with him then?"

"Don't worry, Emmy. But you better go away now. Doc can take you over into Texas. You can leave when it's dark and I'll come along in a few days."

Doc nodded. "I been thinking. Bob, he might come back today. He knows I don't have any women friends, when he gets around to thinking about it. He might get kind of curious. Got a sleeve gun ready if I need it, but I don't want to expose you. I ain't got no handy place to hide you, but

I got to figure out something quick."

He sat at the kitchen table. Once his hand reached for the bottle, and then he snatched it back. Drinking was behind him and he had to think clear. Emmy and Lew was depending on him.

He stood up. "I got a dandy idea. Emmy, jest fold yourself up here inside this 100-pound flour sack what's empty and I'll just pull the tie fast." As she got inside, Doc said, "It'll be a whole site harder for you, Lew, with your sore neck to double your six feet up inside the potato sack, but..."

BOB STOOD at the open door. His eyes popped when he saw Lew. "You ain't here," he stuttered. "I'm seeing things. We strung you up. You ain't here," he repeated, as if he was trying to convince himself.

Lew stood still, his arms hanging useless by his side. He wore no gunbelt, but he grinned.

Doc stepped in front of Lew in an easy movement. "Don't appreciate you busting in here without knocking."

"You old hypocrite," Bob snarled. "I bet you got Emmy hid away. Before I look though, I'm going to take care of Lew for good this time."

Doc stepped closer. "You ain't going to touch your gun." His shoulder twitched slightly and the gun fell into his big hand, which closed around it.

Bob's laugh was nasty. "What's hi

you, doc? All of a sudden, you got guts."

Doc said, "A woman changed me. A good woman what believed I was better than I am. She proved I could be what I always wanted."

"You ain't got long to be it." Bob reached.

"You draw and I'll ventilate you like a pincushion," Doc warned.

Bob laughed, drew...and two shots rang through the room; two bodies fell to the floor. Lew reached down, picked up Doc's little gun and walked over to Bob. He turned him over with his foot. "Dead," he said. "Those little guns are as good as a cannon at close range. You fooled him for sure."

"Got him, did I?" Doc smiled. "He never figured I might be prepared."

Lew bent over him. "Where's he hit you?"

"Ain't nothing, Lew. Reckon he winged me is all." Emmy was kicking up a terrible ruckus in the flour sack. Doc said, "Better let her out quick." Then he blacked out.

When he came to, young Dr. Canner was bending over him, holding some sweet smelling medicine under Doc's nose. Doc struggled to a sitting position and threw the bottle aside. "Jumping Johnny," he roared, "that's enough to turn a man's belly. Emmy, get me my special medicine. I reckon a drop or two won't hurt me while I'm getting to my feet."

Emmy handed the bottle to him. Doc took a slug, then another. He looked around. "Sometimes a man needs this after a shock." He lifted the bottle to his lips again, then threw it in the corner where it smashed. "Don't reckon I had a whopping shock. Things is working out dandy."

Then he looked at Dr. Canner. "Hear you ain't healthy. Been having weakly critters here a long spell now." Doc peered at the pale face. "First thing you gotta do," he said enthusiastically, "is get you a saddle horse and stop riding in that buggy. Harden you up. Then take off that high stiff collar. Cuts off circulation. Then I reckon some of my special medicine might kick some life in you. One sure thing, you'll sleep like a dead man if'n you take it nights."

Dr. Canner grinned. "I've been hearing about your medicine and I have nothing to lose. I'll take a sample. What do I owe you?"

Old Doc looked at him in amazement. "Jumping Johnny, son, ain't we both docs? It ain't legal to take pay. Let's call it perfessional courtesy."

DOC PAUSED. "I been thinking considerable last twenty-four hours. I reckon I'm getting too old to go gallivanting on calls, so's how about me turning over my practice to you?"

"Folks wouldn't let you go," Dr. Canner said. "They think a lot of you."

Old Doc blushed. "Talk more'n they think. But not the way you think. They think I'm a fraud, and yellow, and a drunkard—and they *was* right. But I'm a changed man now. I reckon I want to go somewheres for a clean start."

Emmy's hand crept into one of Doc's. "They know what you are. They know you've got a heart so big that you was gruff all the time and they know you've done the best you could and it's been good too!"

Doc felt a weight lift off his heart. "Emmy, that's mighty nice of you to say that, but I reckon I better be shoving. Thing is, I reckon I got a murder charge hanging fire and I..."

"I guess you're about the biggest hero we got in Rippling Springs," Lew said. "U. S. Marshals are on the way. We been trying to pin down Bob for a spell; seems he wasn't only a cattle rustler and gambler, but he branched out into bank robberies."

"How about you and that cattle rustling you was caught with yesterday?" Doc asked.

Lew grinned. "Had some experience

in changing brands before I joined the law. Sometimes it takes like to catch like, but I'm all reformed now that I'm with the government. I been keeping my eye on this gang some time now."

Doc's eyes popped. "You a U. S. Marshal?"

"Sure, Doc. I'll tell 'em you shot in self defense...and gave him fair warning, and waited until he drew...and there's a big reward you'll be collecting for Bob."

Doc grinned. "Say, Canner, how's about us getting together? You can make the calls and do the night work and I'll take the town work. Open air's what you need. We'll build you up so you'll look like you was raised hereabouts."

"Sure, Doc."

Emmy and Lew started out the door. Old Doc called, "Emmy, I sure do aim to thank you for that talking to you give me. Seems as how my whole life's changed. You might say I'm a new man!"

"Doc, you was all man before. You just needed a nudging to show what you were."

He stroked his chin as the door closed behind them. "You know, sometimes women is peculiar. They know more about a man than he knows about hisself." He grinned. "Yes, sir, they sure are the most wonderful people on earth. Takes a woman to make a man out of a boy."

Young Doc Canner took off his high collar and threw it to the floor. Then he put on Doc's felt hat. "Do I look like a real doctor now?"

"Jumping Johnny," Old Doc exploded, "you ain't rightly dressed in the feet with them bare shoes. We got to get along and buy you some boots with heels."

"You're the doctor," Canner said.

Old Doc smiled. "Guts," he said, "you gotta have plenty of guts—and boots."

★

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KING OF THE WOOLIES

by Elton Webster

There are some men upon whom Fortune smiles; but when Walt King won the stock of a sheepman in a poker game, Fortune laughed out loud!

YOU NEVER can tell about babies. Take, for instance, a lusty, red-faced boy child whose age is still counted in weeks, and not even a mother can foretell his future. He might some day ride to fame in a bucking shell at Cheyenne—or he might become a sheepherder. Such are the heights and depths of human possibilities.

Walt King became a sheepherder.

Not by intent, but by accident. It happened so: with the major share of his savings he had purchased a generous acreage of Arizona grazing land from a friend whose cattle venture had not proved a success. He knew the Box A and knew that the investment was good. That was no accident.

But when a man runs a month's pay into four thousand dollars in an evening of poker—and gives a loser a chance to break even in a big pot—and fills a bobtail flush to win over a pat straight—well, *that* is an accident.

With the purchase of the Box A, King ended his period of service as foreman of a cattle outfit, quit his job and rode jauntily southward to become a cattle baron in his own right. He was still a hundred miles from his new possession when the poker game occurred.

A stranger in a strange town, he accepted a place at the gambling table to wile away a dull evening, determined to hold himself to conservative play. But the game flourished, and no one but a fool will handicap a talent for draw poker by penurious betting. And, too, there were drinks whose potency was reflected in the pots.

IN THE EARLY dawn, therefore, Walt King sat behind an imposing mountain of chips that were his winnings and looked down at a pot that had grown out of all proportion to the hand he held. His four spades were flanked by a diamond of meager spots, and there was a young fortune in the pot.

"Come on stranger. Be a sport and give a feller a chance t' get even!" The man across the table placed a nasty inflection on his challenge, and Walt shoved a pile of chips into the already bloated pot. After all, he could lose this pot and still be far ahead of the game.

"All right," he said. "I'll call. One card, Mister Dealer."

The man across the table grinned. "I'll play these."

Walt's card still lay as it had fallen, face down beside his chips. He covered it with his four spades and shuffled them together, watching the man opposite.

"I'll set myself in." The man with the pat hand shoved all that remained of his chips into the pot, and King glanced down at his hand.

Without a change of expression, he matched the man's stack and shoved his own staggering winnings behind the call. "I'm seein' yer stack—an' raisin' yuh mine," he murmured.

It was a tense moment. The man across the table paled slightly and fumbled his cards. "He's bluffin' yuh, Shep." A third player interpreted Walt's bet, and King smiled. Funny what odd nicknames some men get, he thought, Shep. Now, where would a man pick up a handle like that? "He's bluffin'. He knows y' set yerself in on a pat hand, an' he's runnin' a whizzer."

The man called Shep swore dazedly; then his face brightened with an idea. "I'll call yuh with a bill o' sale fer livestock t' equal yer bet."

Walt looked up at the other men about the table. "I'm a stranger here. I'll leave it t' yuh-all if he's got critters t' cover th' bet. If he has, I'm satisfied. I'm aimin' t' stock a ranch anyhow."

The men nodded confirmation. "He's got 'em all right, stranger." And so the bill of sale was written and eagerly signed, the quantity of livestock being left blank to be filled in. And the pot was called.

Walt watched Shep's eager fingers separating his pat hand: King, Queen, Jack, ten and nine. A straight, King high. "Nice hand," he remarked. His own cards were on the table now, face up in a neat pack. Gently he moved them apart so that all were visible: the Ace, King, ten, eight, four and—three, of Spades.

And the "livestock" he had won were—sheep! *That* was the accident! And it was not until the next morning that Walt King realized the extent of the joke. He had acquired a sizeable flock of white elephants!

"Naw, y' can't sell them woolies around here. An' y' can't keep 'em here, either. We just laid down th' law t' their previous owner that he had to get out, an' I reckon he's plumb glad t' get rid of 'em. Now it's up t' yuh! Th' quicker yuh get them baa-baa's out o' here th' better it'll be fer all concerned!"

Of course he could have ridden on about his business, comfortably winner over and above his sheep, leaving the flock to the mercy of the range. But he refused to admit defeat, even from sheep. Damned if he would be

They were out to drive this sheeper off the range.

made a laughing stock, even in a strange country!

And so he took the flock, and with it the Mexican boy and the two collies who served it, and moved on toward the Box A. Once he had ridden nearly to Championship fame in a bucking shell at Cheyenne. Now—he was a sheepherder!

Days of slow travel as escort and chaperon of a baa-ing flock will rasp the temper of any man. But to a cow man, bred to despise the "woolies" and all who are connected with them, the task was a torture. Walt King was not in the sweetest of moods when his ambling charges were finally shoved within the boundaries of their new home.

A HASTY trip to Vista, nearest town, had provided the first needs of the new rancho. Walt had found his purchase just about as he had expected it: a rude cabin meagerly furnished with the necessities of bachelor living, good water, a good range. His predecessor had found failure not in the country but in the men; better gamblers than himself! Walt had guessed as much, knowing his man. There was no reason here for failure with cattle. But sheep—

Walt swung down from his saddle beside the floor of his new home, leaving his mount tied with dangling reins. It was noon and he must ride again to Vista to stock the place with food and

supplies. As he turned to the door his glance was caught by an arresting patch of white upon the grey boarding and Walt frowned, puzzled.

It was a note on a scrap of soiled paper, pinned to the door with a sliver of wood inserted in a crack. Walt pulled it away and stared at the message.

"Mister Sheepherder:
You ain't wanted on this range. This is cow country. Get out or there'll be trouble—plenty and pronto.
Cattlemen's Vigilante Society."

Walt's fist clenched, crumpling the paper viciously. "Trouble, says you," he growled. "All right, let 'er come!" 'Cattlemen's Vigilante Society', eh? Well, th' Cattlemen's Vigilante Society can go plumb straight t' hell!" His hand lifted to hurl the crumpled ball from him and then poised, startled. A tiny gurgle of amused laughter behind him made him whirl, his right hand dropping instinctively to the gun that swung at his hip.

His jaw dropped as his eyes fell upon his visitor. It was a girl! Walt's eyes widened as his glance swept over her, from the tiny, 'broidered boots with their spurred heels to the crown of the great Stetson. She was the prettiest thing he had ever seen. Walt decided that point even before his fumbling hand left the gun butt to sweep his own hat from his head. Brown hair that curled roguishly from beneath the shadowing sombrero; eyes twinkling with merriment; lips as red as berries; cheeks tanned a little by Arizona sun and dimpled now, betwitchingly, as she laughed.

"Oh," she ended her laughter to beam upon him. "If father could only have heard you! When he gets really angry his face gets all red... Nearly as red as yours is now."

Walt flushed still more and hated himself for it. His hand dropped to his side, reminding him of the threatening message he had been about to discard. Instantly his anger returned.

"I reckon y're th' author o' this, then." He straightened the crumpled paper and held it toward her, threateningly.

"Oh, no. I was just riding by and saw a man put it there. So I read it, and then I saw you coming and hid to see what you'd do."

WALT GLANCED about in search of her mount and she read the question before he asked it. "My horse is behind your house," she told him. "That's where I hid."

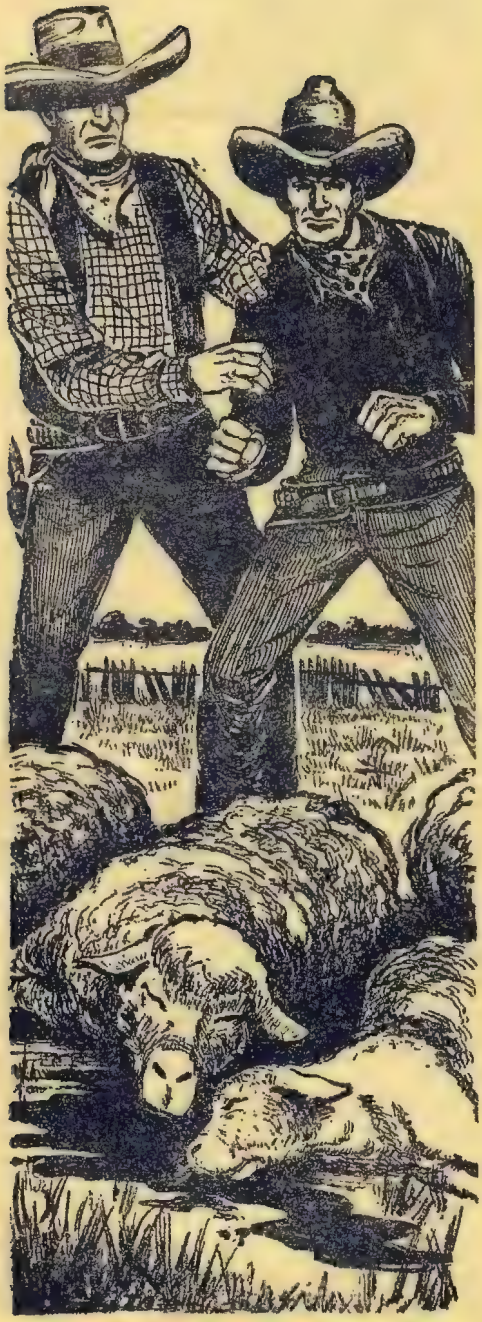
"Y' said yuh saw a man put this here. Who was he?"

"Now, that would be telling, wouldn't it? And I couldn't be giving information to the enemy, you know. And of course we *are* enemies. You just said that the Cattlemen's Vigilante Society could go plumb straight to hell," she mocked his growling tone perfectly, "and since my father is its president, and since I wouldn't have my father going to hell for anything in the world, why naturally that makes us enemies."

She paused, her cool gaze traveling slowly over the man before her. He was tall and broad and decent looking—almost handsome, she thought, with the deep auburn of his hair accenting his blondness. And he was dressed as all the men she knew were dressed: booted and chapped and spurred and hatted, a Colt in a low hung holster, the holster tip tied above his knee.

"You know," she said, "you don't look like a sheepherder at all."

Her tone was not at all that of an enemy, but Walt King was too angry to notice the friendliness of her. "I reckon yuh think 'cause a man's runnin' a bunch o' woolies he ought t' look like a murderer," he growled.



Walt didn't like sheep, either.

"And you talk like a cattle man." the girl continued.

Walt's look of utter rage set her laughing again and he flung away into the cabin, her laughter goading his anger. Inside, while he recovered his little fortune from its hiding place and extracted from it enough to cover his purchases, he found his anger cooling as rapidly as it had come. She was a pretty kid, he reflected; and anyway she probably had nothing to do with the note. He might tell her the truth—that he was a sheepherder by accident. But no; that would look as if he were begging off because of the Vigilante's warning. No, he wouldn't tell her. But he would be civil to her... Yes, he'd be civil, at least!

That is, if she was still there... She was. When he appeared again outside the cabin the girl had established herself in the friendship of Walt's mount, and he stared, talking meanwhile in a murmuring undertone. She turned as Walt appeared and smiled at him. "I like your horse," she said. "Much too good for a sheepherder, I think."

The smile disarmed her thrust and Walt remembered his determination to be civil. "Yeah. Funny he's made up with yuh so quick. I call him Towsome because he seems t' think me an' him are a plenty on any party. Looks like I'll have t' change that, now that he's made up with you."

"You might at least say you approve of his judgment." Her eyes were sparkling with coquetry again and Walt succumbed to their friendliness.

"Sure I do! He's a smart horse... I'm plumb sorry t' take him away from yuh, but I sure got to have him if I'm goin' t' town in time t' buy groceries. However..." Walt was determined to be civil now—at least! "Maybe he'll be seein' yuh again, Miss, t' strengthen yer friendship like."

"Of course! In fact, I'll just ride to town with—him, to make the most of

the opportunity! That is, if his owner doesn't object."

It was really strange that a sheepherder and a cattleman's daughter should find so much of interest to occupy their conversation, and yet when they reached town no chance observer would ever have supposed them to be enemies. They separated before the general store where Walt would buy his supplies and the girl made much of her farewell to Twosome.

"I'd stay with you longer, darling," she told him, "only I must hurry and take these preserves to Mrs. O'Rourke. She's sick, you know...and, anyway, I'll see you again, won't I?"

She was talking to the horse, but Walt cut in with an answer. "That's a promise, I hope."

She laughed gayly and her horse was already bearing her down the street while she waved goodby. Walt watched her go, smiling thoughtfully. She was really a queen, he reflected. Pretty as the devil and darned interesting company.

GOOD LORD! He slapped his leg in sudden remembrance. He hadn't asked her name! What a fool! But someone in town would know. He would ask about her before he left town, sure.

His supplies purchased and a wagon promised to carry them out to the Box A, he crossed the street to a building whose blatant front gave promise of thirst quenching potions inside. Beside the door of the saloon an ancient poster gave notice of a reward for some long captured criminal. It reminded Walt of the message lately placed upon his own door, and he paused, regarding it.

With sudden resolve he tore the poster from its place and carefully removed the tacks that had held it. From his pocket he produced another soiled scrap of paper and a pencil stub. On the reverse of the poster he scribbled a brief message. Unfolding the warning note which he had almost thrown away before the girl's interruption, he placed it above the poster against the wall and set a tack to hold them both. His gun butt served as a hammer and he tacked the corners down neatly.

He stepped back then and regarded his work with some pride. The note from the Cattlemen's Vigilante Society was superimposed upon his answer to it, and the wording of the latter message was as terse as the one above:

TO WHOEVER IT MAY CONCERN:

I AIM TO BE AT HOME REGULAR AND PERMANENT. TROUBLE IS MY MIDDLE NAME.

WALT KING.

He entered the saloon for a drink—had two, while he consulted the bartender concerning the weather, the possibility of rain, the quality of whiskey—and the name of a certain girl who had brown, curly hair and blue eyes. The bartender seemed suspiciously ignorant upon the last subject; the more so inasmuch as the sign on the front of his establishment read quite plainly *O'Rourke's Saloon*—and the girl had distinctly said that she was bearing preserves to Mrs. O'Rourke.

Walt paid for his drinks, accompanying his coin with a particularly sour look aimed at the bartender. The look passed unnoticed and Walt walked out, finding a small amount of consolation in the fact that a little group of men paused from their inspection of his recent handiwork to eye him dubiously as he passed.

FURTHER down the street he entered the tiny cubicle which served Vista as Postoffice and asked for his mail. There were two letters, one of which he opened and read with evi-

Walt King knew what night-raiding would mean...

dent interest. Having finished it, he returned to the postman's window and smiled blankly.

"What day o' th' month is it, pardner?" he asked.

"It's th' twenty-third—an' I ain't pardner t' no sheepherder!" The postmaster's reply was intended as a scathing rebuke, but it seemed to have little effect upon his customer.

"Th' twenty-third, eh? Thanks... Too bad y' ain't interested in sheep." His remark was altogether friendly. "There's money in them woolies, now. Y'd be surprised!"

Outside on the street again he retraced his steps toward *O'Rourke's Saloon*. The group of men about the posted message was larger now and seemed peculiarly absorbed by it. The buzz of their voices reached him as he neared them, but the conversation ended abruptly as they became aware of him. He surveyed them coolly, walking with unhurried step.

They were cattle men, a dozen or more of them, led, seemingly by a tall, middle aged man who formed the center of the group. He was as tall as King; six feet at least and bulkily built. He wore a mustache which drooped with exaggerated ferocity beside the corners of his mouth.

As Walt came abreast of the group the tall man pushed through the circle about him and blocked the way. His scowl was accentuated by the mustache into a fearsome thing. Walt paused facing him, his look of blank inquiry seeming to enrage the cattle man still more.

"Y're th' author o' that damn' insolent scrawl, ain't yuh?"

Walt turned an expressionless face to the poster, read it with elaborate care, and then nodded slowly. "Yeah. It sure looks a heap like my handwritin'. Y' been havin' some trouble readin' it?" he inquired, politely.

The tall man snorted. "I can read it too damn' well!" He took a step nearer and thrust his face toward King, his jaw protruding belligerently. "Now, y' listen t' me, feller: "I'm Mathews, President of th' Cattlemen's Vigilante Society. We done warned yuh t' get them damn' sheep off this range, an' we mean business. Sheep ruins th' range, an' we ain't a-goin' t' stand for 'em. What's more, no sheepherdin' son is goin' t' get smart an' get away with it!..."

Walt's bland good humor had vanished under the epithet and his jaw jutted out now as aggressively as that of the older man. His words cutting into the other's threats were terse and hard. "I'll give yuh just about three seconds t' eat that name yuh called me!"

Mathews' anger almost choked him, and his eloquence gave way to a sputtering of profanity. The audacity of Walt's challenge maddened him and he swung furiously, his heavy fists flailing across the sheepman's shoulders.

Walt saw the blows coming and sidestepped. As Mathews lunged forward, carried by the impetus of his attack, Walt hooked a hard left and right in quick time to the man's jaw. Mathews jerked erect as the blows landed and charged again, bellowing.

The group of cattle men, confident of their champion, drew back to form a circle which was rapidly filled in by new arrivals drawn by the sound of the battle.

Walt met Mathews' charge fairly time and they came together in a flurry of thudding fists. Walt planted a solid right in his opponent's face as he came in and took a swinging left to the side of his jaw in payment. It was a heavy blow and Walt welcomed the brief respite of the clinch that followed.

Instantly, however, he realized his error. This was no ring encounter under Marquis of Queensbury rules. He found himself crushed in the grip of powerful arms and bent backward as

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FUN FOR MEN

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Mathews made use of his superior weight. Walt drove his fists into the kidneys and heard the man grunt explosively. And then he was swung clear of the ground, still helpless in that mighty grip. He twisted his body desperately and the cattleman flung him away...

Walt fell heavily, the shock of it taken partially upon his arms and shoulders. Mathews lunged after him and Walt rolled toward the charge, catching the booted feet in a tripping tackle. The big man crashed down, stumbling over Walt's prone body, and the sheepman sprang up, shaking his head like a drenched dog to clear it of the daze of his fall.

MATHEWS struggled to his feet, surprised at Walt's failure to follow up his advantage. Once more he charged and Walt sidestepped swiftly, cutting in viciously to the side of the jaw as Mathews passed him. This time he followed the blow, catching Mathews with a sharp hook as he turned and lifting him again with a left that snapped the cattleman's head back. Instantly King's right came up in a smashing hook that seemed to lift Mathews from his feet.

It was a knockout, as complete as if that driving fist had been a sledge. Mathews fell backward, crashing down like a felled tree, unconscious before he hit the ground.

Walt watched him fall...turned slowly to sweep the circle of men about him with a smouldering gaze. "Trouble," he remarked, tersely, "is my middle name. If there's any more o' you hombres hankerin' for it I'll be glad t'—"

A darting, slender figure broke through the circle opposite him and ran, crying, to the prone figure on the ground. "Dad!.. Oh Dad, have they killed you?" She dropped to her knees beside Mathews and lifted the battered head in her arms.

Walt King lifted an uncertain hand to his eyes, trying hard to brush from them the scene that must be a dream. The girl was his visitor at the ranch ...the girl who had carried preserves to Mrs. O'Rourke! Well, that ended that, with appalling definiteness! He liked that girl; liked her a hell of a lot —and now he had whipped her Dad!

Mathews opened his eyes slowly and struggled free from the girl's arms. He attained a sitting posture and glared up at King, his anger returning with his consciousness.

"I reckon yuh win, sheepherder," he said. "And they ain't nothin' I can say to yuh, now that my gal's horned in. But get this straight: this thing ain't ended! I ain't holdin' no grudge against yuh fer th' lickin' yuh give me, but we ain't gonna stand fer no woolies on this range! You move 'em out, or they'll be hell t' pay an' yuh a-payin' it!"

Walt heard the words and understood their meaning, but they seemed far away and unreal. His eyes were focused upon a pair of blue ones that blazed at him from a spot beside and almost level with Mathews' shoulder as he stood erect—a pair of eyes that had lost all the brimming fun he had seen in them an hour ago—eyes that were beautiful even now despite the hatred he read in them.

He stood so, silent and facing the girl, until her low voice followed the heavier one of her father: "I hate you!" she said, distinctly. "I hope they—kill you, you—*sheepherder!*

She made the name an epithet that stung more deep than the one which had caused the fight. Walt nodded slowly, accepting her anger as a natural and justifiable thing; turned slowly and walked straight to the store where Twosome waited.

The girl's anger died in her gasp of dismay as he turned his back upon the crowd. Most of these men were ranch-

[*Turn To Page* 114]

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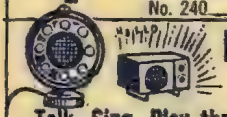

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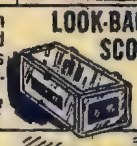

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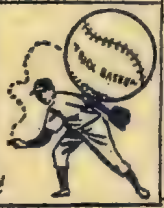

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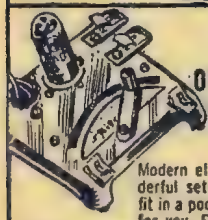

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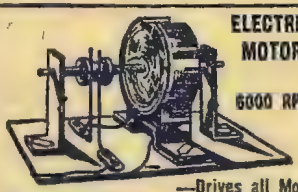

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men and of these she had no fear. But there were others... She glimpsed a furtive hand already hovering above a holstered gun...another... She left her father's side, darting out to stand between the departing figure and the clump of men who watched him go, her eyes intent upon the crowd. Mathews sensed the danger an instant later and joined his daughter, his low growl menacing. "There won't be any shootin'," he stated, shortly. "Leastways, no shootin' a man in th' back."

WALT KING had exhausted his vocabulary of profanity long before the distance to the Box A was covered. He began at the beginning of a lengthy list of grievances—not forgetting the sheepman whose woes he had won at cards—and cursed his way systematically down to the present fiasco that culminated in a girl's blazing anger. There was hardly any doubt in the world that he was the champion hard-luck cowboy of all time. He was convinced of it. Emphatically convinced!

Days followed in which Walt found much time for further reflection upon his misfortune. The Mexican boy and the collies needed little of his help in tending the flock and he devoted his time in part to chores and odd jobs at the cabin. His supplies came out from Vista as per his agreement with the wagoner and he was mildly surprised. They were not planning to starve him out, at least.

MORE DAYS, and Twosome had carried Walt King into every corner of the domain that was theirs; explored every wandering arroyo and every bend of the whispering little stream that cut the ranch in halves. And then a day when Red guided the horse beyond the limits of his own boundaries, along the banks of the stream to its mouth at the river a few miles beyond.

He dismounted then and led Twosome down a rough cow path that marked a ford across the pebbly shallows. There was succulent grass beneath the shade of the river bank and he left the horse to graze while he strolled aimlessly up the stream.

A hundred yards above the ford the river changed from a broad, shallow plate of sliding ripples to run for awhile between narrowing banks. There was just room to walk between the water and the bank on the side Walt followed, while on the opposite side the perpendicular wall rose twenty feet above the current which licked at its base.

A little further on, where the little canyon changed its course, the river had hollowed out a deep pocket in the bank, the current lashing against it in never-ceasing greed. Further out from the wall the water was comparatively still and Walt guessed that the pool formed by this backwash was deep beneath its quiet surface.

He watched awhile, wondering idly how soon the over-hanging wall would cave and drop another mouthful of soil to those greedy jaws below. And then a shimmering reflection on the mirroring surface of the pool sent his eyes aloft to the rim opposite him.

There, silhouetted against the blue of the sky, a trim figure in a scarlet swimming suit stood poised for a dive. It was the Mathews girl! He caught the gleam of sunlight on the copper brown of her curls. If that bank should cave in now!

He tried to shout, to tell her of what he feared; saw the first trickle of crumbling soil that told him he was too late. Her knees bent for the thrust that would send her into space, and the tiny jar of it was the final straw that started the slide. The ground crumbled beneath her, so that her leap became a fall as the feet missed their support. Her body turned in the air, and she brought her knees up instinc-

[*Turn To Page* 116]

RACING CAR DRIVER FRANK KOHN SAYS: "THIS REVOLUTIONARY PRODUCT HAS INCREASED MY CAR SPEED & POWER UP TO 50%—STOPPED OIL BURNING"

SAYS RACING DRIVER FRANK KOHN OF PHILADELPHIA:

"I have been driving racing cars for 18 years and now I never start a race without a tube of Pepgo in my car for emergency use. You know how grueling a stock car race can be and what wear and tear it produces on the engine. I have already used this miracle piston-ring sealer in some of my most heated races and restored my engine performance.

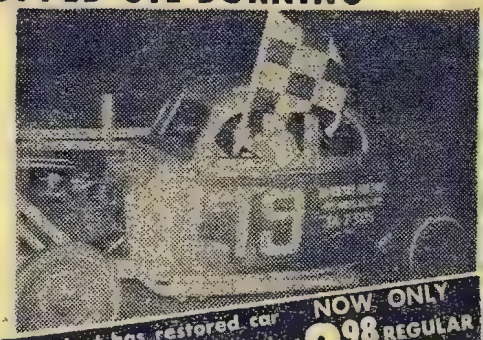
At the race in The Philadelphia Municipal Stadium I was driving car #79 with a sportsmen type Ford V8 engine. Right in the middle of the race I began to lose power and speed and was burning up all my lubricating oil and fouling my plugs. I pulled into the pit area during the second heat and in a couple of minutes took out my spark plugs and quickly injected a tube of piston-ring sealer to compete in the third heat. Back in the race my car quickly picked up speed and power, and I was able to go on again even faster than when the car started the race, finished second in the race, and won a Liberty Stock Car Racing Association trophy cup for the season.

The results lasted for over 5,000 grueling miles and when I pulled the engine down later I could still see the sealer.

I have found that Pepgo Ring Seal is a revolutionary development for quickly restoring power and stopping oil waste in a worn automotive engine. I recommend it to all my friends and customers and have been using this miracle product since it was first developed.

Pepgo Ring Seal, I am sure can do wonders in your car engine just as it has done them for me."

Frank Kohn
Philadelphia, Pa.



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TEST #1

A 1945 "Dodge" 6 cylinder truck had been driven over 100,000 miles without overhaul and was using over a quart of oil every 100 miles. Rated compression of engine when new was 110 lbs. After one PEPGO RING SEAL treatment average cylinder compression now was raised over 40% from 76 to 107 lbs. Oil consumption was greatly reduced and gasoline mileage increased.

Compression Readings—1945 Dodge Truck

	Cylinder 1	Cylinder 2	Cylinder 3	Cylinder 4	Cylinder 5	Cylinder 6
Before	87 lbs.	75 lbs.	75 lbs.	60 lbs.	75 lbs.	85 lbs.
After	100 lbs.	110 lbs.	115 lbs.	95 lbs.	105 lbs.	118 lbs.

TEST #2

Engine Compression Completely Restored in 1948 Pontiac

A 1948 Pontiac "8" with 77,000 miles was using a quart of oil every 200 to 300 miles. After one PEPGO RING SEAL Treatment average cylinder compression was increased from 107 lbs. to 120 lbs. or equal to factory standards when new. The car now exhibited exceptional pep, even on the mountains of Vermont. Oil consumption was more than cut in half. Gasoline mileage was increased more than 20%

Compression Readings — 1948 Pontiac

	Cylinder 1	Cylinder 2	Cylinder 3	Cylinder 4	Cylinder 5	Cylinder 6	Cylinder 7	Cylinder 8
Before	105 lbs.	95 lbs.	107 lbs.	120 lbs.	110 lbs.	115 lbs.	95 lbs.	123 lbs.
After	125 lbs.	120 lbs.	120 lbs.	125 lbs.	122 lbs.	120 lbs.	115 lbs.	116 lbs.

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tively to guard against the flat slap of the impact. Behind her a deep sector of the bank leaned out toward the river, slowly at first, ripping free from the grass roots above—poised, and thundered down into geysers of leaping, triumphant spray.

Walt's hands were jerking at the buckles of chaps and gunbelt even as the girl's curled-up body struck the water. He kicked free from them and plunged, a flat, hard dive, reaching out even as he hit the water to begin a powerful overhand.

He saw an outflung arm for a second in the churning surf ahead and realized with sickening certainty that the girl was helpless...cursed at the water that seemed to hold him back as if with malevolent, clinging hands.

She was not in sight when he reached the spot and he dived, swimming down into the vicious shirls and eddies that were molding and digesting the new meal. Down, until his lungs seemed about to burst—until his mind rebelled against the will that forced him on—until his outflung hand brushed a cold arm that he caught and gripped.

The undertow laid its grim fingers upon them jealously. Walt felt the sledge strokes of his heart, pounding as lungs labored for oxygen. He fought upward against the river demons with a desperate strength...felt at last the rush of precious air upon his face...

The current caught them savagely and hurled them against the wall, Walt's shoulder fending off the blow and shielding the limp form in his arms. A moment later and they were swept clear of the narrows, into the shallowing waters of the lower river.

Walt staggered through the glittering ripples of the ford and laid his burden upon the new grass beneath the bank. Minutes then that were hours while he labored over her, his breath

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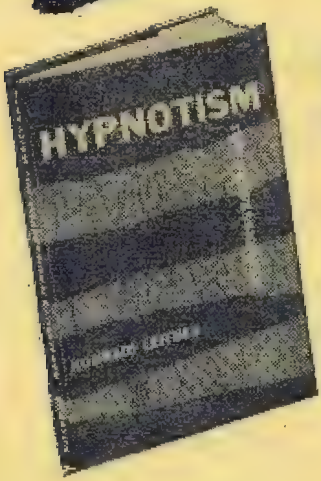

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Illusions, Unlimited
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rasping in sobbing gasps between his teeth...

She moved at last and he lifted her head in his arms, brushing the clinging curls from her face. She was breathing almost naturally now and he stooped swiftly, his lips touching hers. "Thank God," he whispered. And then, turning shining eyes to the river: "Yuh didn't get her, damn yuh! I took her away from yuh!"

LATER, AFTER he had silenced her impulsive thanks with his gruff disclaimor of credit, he brought her pony and her clothes from the other bank and left her awhile, walking swiftly upstream. She could hear him there, whistling reassuringly, while she dressed, and she smiled happily at the reflection of her face in the water as she straightened the tangled mass of her hair.

When he returned he wore again the leather gear of the rider, but his coppery hair still glistened damply in the sunlight. She welcomed him smilingly. "The last time I saw you," she said, "I told you I hated you. I—want to take that back—now." He flushed and his eyes dropped before hers. "In fact, since the river didn't get me—since you took me away from it, you know—we'll just have to be friends, won't we?"

He looked up at her, startled. Was she quoting his own words, or was it just the chance phrasing of accident? If she had heard that...she might have been aware of his kiss, too. Her eyes were full of dancing lights and there was no answer in them.

"Only it wasn't really the river, you know. The river and I are friends. I was all right until I came to the top again and something hit me...part of the slide, I suppose. But—we *are* friends, aren't we? Dad said you had a perfect right to hit him, and I'm sorry for what I said.."

"Sure, Miss. Lord, I—I didn't blame

[*Turn To Page* 120]

New Invention Shows You How You May SAVE YOUR HAIR

FICTION AND FACT: First, let's separate fiction from facts. If your hair roots are dead, there's nothing in this world you can do about it. But if your roots still have life in them, you may be able to do something about it. If you are losing your hair due to insufficient circulation of the blood and tissue fluid you can be helped. Medical science recommends massage and brushing, but human nature being what it is, we never get around to giving ourselves the proper amount of hair-saving massage and brushing.

Amazing New Invention Does the Work!

Some doctors now believe that nervous tension may be a factor in falling hair and baldness. Emotional tension may produce circulatory impairment to the scalp, which tends to interfere with nutrition of the hair roots. Hair thins out and bald spots appear.

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yuh. And o' course we're friends."

She was on her way to town again, she told him, taking more delicacies to Mrs. O'Rourke, and none of his solicitous advice could persuade her to postpone her trip. "I'm all right now" she insisted. "If I went back now I'd have to tell Dad what happened, and I won't—yet... I do thank you, Mr. Walt King! I'm awfully grateful, whether you want me to be or not!" She was serious for an instant, and Walt flushed again.

She laughed then and left him, and he watched her ride away, conscious of a poignant happiness that throbbed in his veins like a heady liquor. And then...

"Well, I'll be damned!" he whispered. "I fergot t' ask her her name!"

That night outside the cabin at the Box A, King sat and watched while yellow stars were born out of the dark mists of the sky to brighten and glow like pinpoints of light on a cloudy sea. He stretched his legs along the curly turf of matted grass and leaned back luxuriously against the wall of his home.

He had not made a light. Sitting in the dark and staring into the light he was alone with his thoughts, and thoughts tonight, were pleasant company.

Today was the last of the month. Tomorrow, if there had been no delay, he would have a visitor as promised in the letter that had come for him to Vista. An important guest, this one. Walt smiled dreamily, thinking of the other guest whose going had left such nameless longings in his heart. He wondered if she would like him better...after tomorrow?

Like him? He would never be satisfied with just her friendship. He knew that now, and somehow the knowing of it was an added joy.

The distant drumming of hoofs on hard prairie turf aroused him and he

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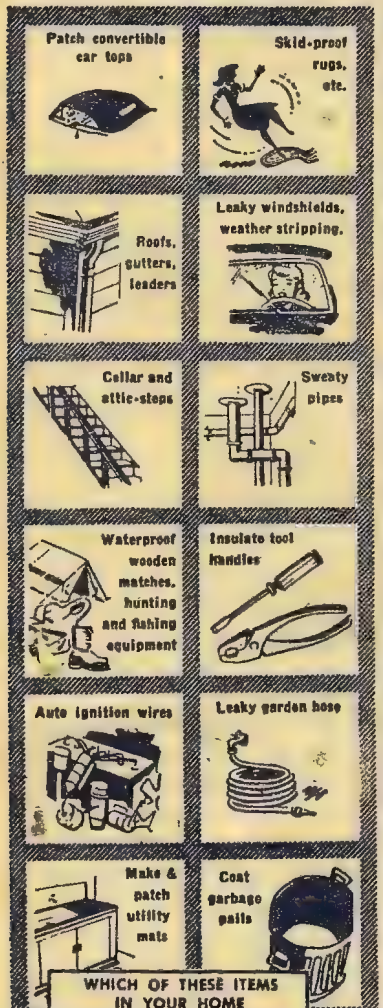

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stood up, facing the trail toward the town. This was no ordinary traveler, this rider. Men do not ride at such a pace on common errands.

The horse and rider loomed upon him from the darkness suddenly and the clatter of hoofs made an echoing din in his ears. His hand rested caressingly upon the butt of the gun at his hip.

HE SPRANG forward, recognizing her voice before his eyes could be sure of her. She was out of the saddle before the horse had stopped, her hands clutching at his arm.

"They're coming after you, Walt! I heard them talking in O'Rourke's saloon. I slipped out the back way to avoid the men up front and they were in a room at the back. I heard them talking." She was frightened and her words tumbled over each other so rapidly that he was slow in understanding. Coming for him.. Who?

"It's all right, honey." He caught her hands and bent over her, his voice soothing and gentle. "Who is it that's comin' for me? The Vigilante's outfit?"

"No. Oh no! I wouldn't let Dad's men come! I could have stopped them. But those others... They're bad men, Walt; rustlers, and worse, some of them. Dad's men have tried to drive them away but they come back... They're coming for you, Walt. I heard them. They think you have a lot of money hidden here and they'll kill you to get it! You must hurry—come home with me. They were ready to leave Vista when I came away."

Walt nodded slowly. The news of his killing at cards had followed him. These men had heard of it and the lure of easy money had attracted them. The girl was right; they would kill for what they wanted. Plenty of drifting scum in all these border towns. He knew the breed...

[*Turn To Page* 124]

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They were coming now. He caught the first faint rumble of their approach in the still night air. They must have ridden hard to be so close upon the girl's track. Eager, like wolves scenting a kill...

"No. I'll stay an' meet them!" King's jaw set stubbornly. "Hurry! Get on yer horse and ride, honey—Tell yer Dad what's up if you want to, and tell him t' come here..."

"I won't! I won't move unless you come..."

The riders were very near now. Walt sensed the iron resistance of the girl's will and saw the futility of argument. He caught the bridle of her mount and led him around the cabin, out of sight from the trail. The girl followed, silent now but determined.

"You stay here," Walt told her. "It'll be all right. Thanks t' you, they ain't got th' advantage of surprisin' me. I can get th' drop on 'em and send 'em packin'..."

The horsemen were thundering into the ranchyard now, their clamor profaning the night silences. Walt slipped along the shadowed wall of the cabin to a corner from which he could get a view of the front, and the girl followed him, breathless with excitement.

There were four men before the door of the cabin; three still sitting in their saddles while the fourth advanced toward the darkened door. The darkness and the silence seemed to puzzle him for he paused and Walt heard him call, gruffly: "Hello, inside there!" There was no answer and the man called again. "Come on out, y' damn sheepherder! We done warned yuh t' get yer woolies off this range..."

Walt smiled grimly into the dark. They had planned to pose as Vigilantes, guessing, perhaps, that he would be loath to resist with gunplay against solid ranchmen.

King's gun was clear of its holster as he stepped beyond the corner of the wall, and his voice was clear and

hard; "Stick 'em up!—yuh damn' coyotes!"

The man at the door whirled toward the speaker, cursing. His gun flashed up and Walt hurled a shot into the red flame of its challenge. Other guns were speaking now and Walt heard the whine of their slugs in his ears. His holdup had failed

A bullet seared the muscles of his upper arm and Walt felt the warm flow of blood inside his sleeve as he turned his gun upon the mounted men. The man at the door had dropped already before his first shot. The horses, frantic at sound and sight of the firing, were plunging now and their fright was disconcerting the attack.

King's gun blazed again as one of the riders swung his weapon down for a shot, and the man lurched in the saddle and was thrown as his horse lunged. A stabbing pain burned into Walt's shoulder and his left arm dropped limp. His gun roared again, and he staggered to the wall, leaning against it for support while he searched for a target.

HALF DAZED, he heard a strident shout of warning from one of the attackers: "Fan it, Pete! Somebody's comin'!" The remaining two horsemen whirled in flight and Walt lifted his gun to send a parting shot into their retreat. Dimly, as from a great distance, he heard the rapid drum of running horses—heard men shouting. Someone touched him with clinging, eager hands and he heard a nearer voice this time, speaking welcome words: "Walt! . . Oh, my darling, have they—are you hurt, Walt? Speak to me, can't you?"

A little later, when the first shock of his wounds had passed, Walt King looked up from his cot into anxious eyes that were very blue and very deep. Still later, he saw, beyond the girl as she leaned above him, the loom-

[*Turn Page*]

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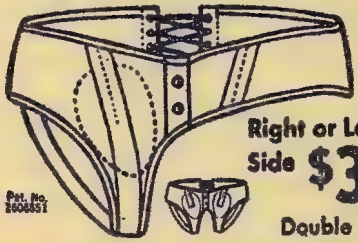

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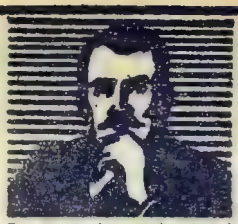

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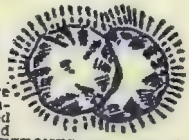

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ing figure of a man with heavy, drooping mustaches. It was Mathews.

"Feelin' better, young feller?" The ranchman's voice boomed heartily; so heartily that Walt wondered if he had learned already about the visitor who would come tomorrow.

"Sure. I'm—all right, I guess. Foolish of me t' pass out like that."

"Not so foolish, I reckon, with a .44 slug smashing yer shoulder that-a-way. An' y' did a right thorough job 'fore yuh passed out, I'd say. Two o' them hombres is plumb salivated, an' another one got winged some. My gang caught 'em 'fore they could get away. Yuh done us a service fer sure, King, riddin' us o' them coyotes."

"They'd a rid yuh of a sheepherder, too, I reckon, if you hadn't come up just when yuh did. How'd that happen, Mathews?"

Mathews shifted his feet and looked down, embarrassed. "Well, now, th' fact is, we was comin' over t' sort-a-escort yuh off the range, King. Th' boys was kinda sore about them woolies, an'... An' then we seen yuh was in trouble, and we didn't aim t' have yuh killed so we rode in, an..."

Mathews paused then, staring down at the girl perched upon Walt's bed. The message of her silent lips and her frown penetrated his understanding at last and he backed awkwardly toward the door. He stopped there for a moment and his eyes turned from the girl's face to the man on the bed. "About them sheep o' yers, King. I reckon, long as yuh keep 'em grazed on yer own land we ain't got any room t' kick. Y' can ferget about that, if y'will."

[*Turn To Page* 128]

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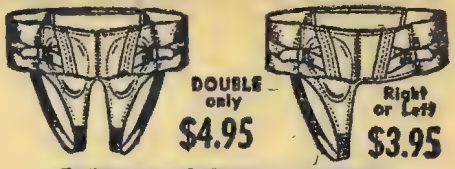

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HE DISAPPEARED, and once more the blue eyes were very near Walt's face. He smiled up at them happily. "This is our unlucky day, seems like," he said. "First you fall in th' river, an' then I get shot up."

Something he saw in her eyes made him pause, and then he added, softly. "Maybe I'm wrong, sweetheart. Maybe it's our—lucky day! ...Could you, maybe, fall in love with a sheepherder?"

Her answer brought his one strong arm about her, pulling her down until her lips touched his; clung, this time, and seemed loath ever to leave again.

"Our *second* kiss," she whispered, afterward, and Walt stared at her, realizing her meaning.

"Yuh *did* know, then," he challenged her, happily. And then, whimsically: "Maybe I better not sell them sheep, after all. Seems like they brought me luck."

"Sell them?" She stared at him, puzzled.

"Sure." He grinned at her, teasingly. "Y' already said I didn't look like a sheepman! I won 'em in a poker game an' couldn't get rid of 'em. But I wired a man I know that raises sheep and he's comin' for 'em tomorrow. And then I'm goin' t' stock this ranch with cattle, and then..."

"And then?" Her eyes were full of dancing lights again, but this time he found an answer there.

"And then I'm goin' t' see if yuh could love me when I'm *not* a sheepherder," he promised. "Which reminds me, sweetheart—"It's about time yuh told me yer name, don't y' think?"

She laughed then and bent over him again. "Does it matter?" she whispered. "I like—what you called me—and the rest of my name I intend to change soon, anyway!"

And, to Walt at least, it didn't seem to matter.

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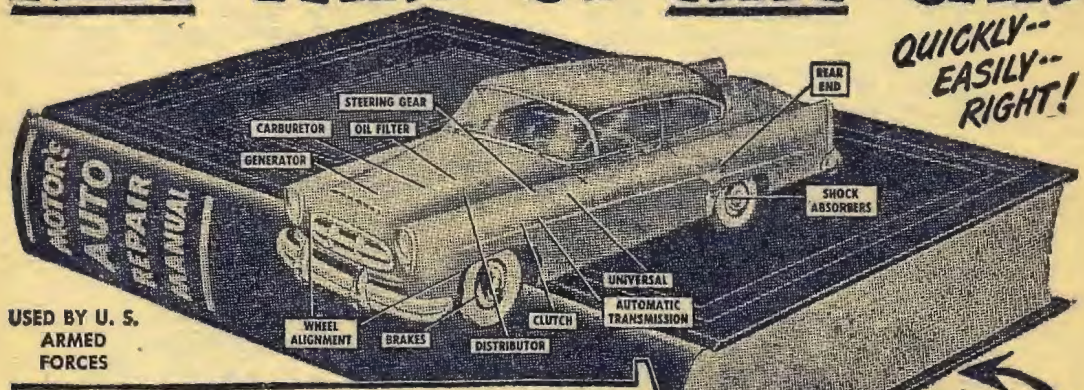

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ANSWERS To Western Brain-Mixers

1. John Wesley Hardin the noted gunfighter, in a fight shot a man in Abilene, Kansas, and rode thirty-five miles in his underwear without stopping.
2. He means that he has broke the girth attaching saddle to horse.
3. John Wesley Hardin's father was a Methodist minister and later a lawyer.
4. The valiant commander, Lieut.-Col. W. B. Travis, David Crockett, and Col. James Bowie, for whom the bowie knife was named.
5. Arroyos means dry bed. In the Southwest, in the dry season many small rivers vanish, leaving dry creek beds which are called arroyos.
6. Wes Hardin was fifteen years old when he killed his first man.
7. The cowboy started up the trail October 23rd. He started up the trail with the 2 U-herd.
8. In order they mean: A horse herd, A rope, A crude type of leather made from cowhide, To drag by means of a rope.
9. A nester is a homesteader on a government claim.
10. True. John Wesley Hardin the noted gunfighter, once practiced law.
11. Arizona and New Mexico were our two last states to be admitted to the Union.
12. True. Wild hogs were so numerous in the early days of the West, that settlers devised traps to catch them.
13. Near Lawton at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, in 1909.
14. Nevada has the nickname of the Stagebrush State.
15. Wes Hardin the famous gunfighter.
16. April 22, 1889, was the date that Congress set, as the day upon which white settlers could stake out a claim in the Indian Territory.
17. Idaho, Utah and Montana.
18. Butte, Montana, had the greatest copper-mining camp in the world.
19. Texas and Montana.
20. Wes Hardin, the noted gunman, was killed August 19, 1895, by a man named John Selman. Witnesses testified that Hardin made no move to draw his guns, although he carried two.

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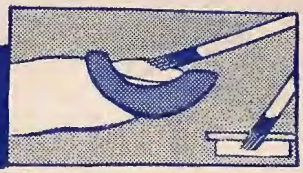

2—Simply place Nail form under your nail and apply powder with a wet brush. It's just like applying nail polish and doesn't require any more time.

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